

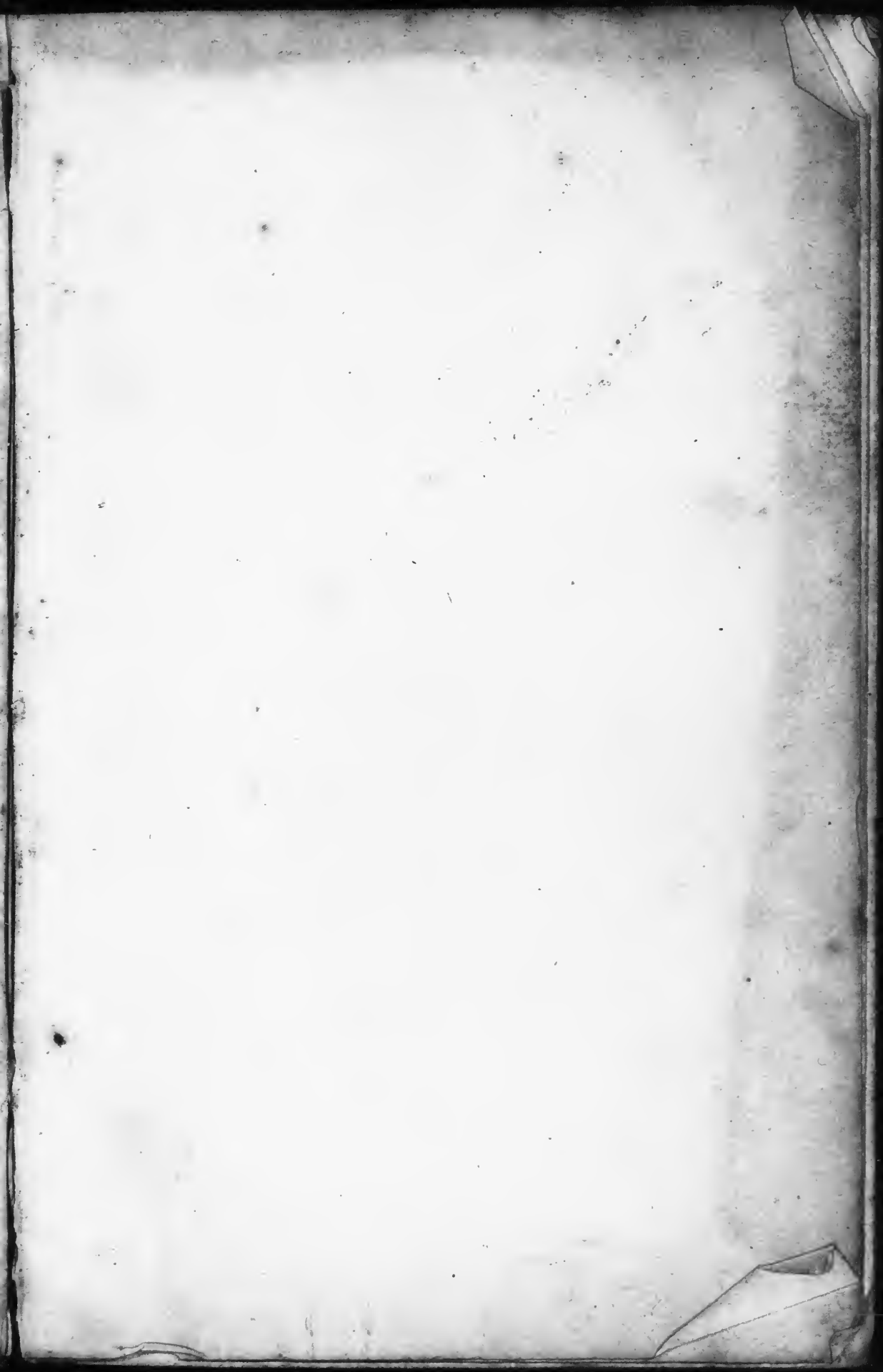


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Marget Gray

This Book presented  
to her as a token  
of merit  
August 1818

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SERMONS  
TO  
YOUNG PERSONS,

ON THE  
FOLLOWING SUBJECTS, *viz.*


- I. The importance of the rising Generation.
- II. Christ formed in the Soul, the Foundation of Hope.
- III. A dissuasive from keeping wicked Company.
- IV. The Young Christian invited to an early Attendance on the Lord's Table.
- V. The Orphan's Hope.
- VI. The Reflections of a Pious Parent on the Death of a Wicked Child.
- VII. Youth reminded of approaching Judgment.

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BY P. DODDRIDGE, D. D.  
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A NEW EDITION.

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*London :*

PRINTED FOR P. WRIGHT, 45, BROAD STREET,  
BLOOMSBURY.

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1811.

BW23  
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## DEDICATION.

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*To the young persons belonging to the dissenting congregations at Hinkley, Harborough, and Kibworth, in Leicestershire, and at Ashley, and Northampton.*

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*My dear Brethren and Friends,*

**A**T length, after a long and unexpected delay, I offer to your perusal, a few sermons which I promised the public some years ago; all which some or other of you heard, and in which you are all concerned.

It is not material to tell you, on what account I have laid by some, which I had transcribed for your service, and which you probably expected to have seen with these. I have substituted in their room such, as I thought might, by the divine blessing, be most useful to you.

I hope you will peruse them with candour; and the rather, considering they were prepared for the press chiefly in some broken moments, while I was on journeys, or in some fragments



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of time at home, often taken from my sleep, as the stated duties of my calling require an attendance, which will not allow of any long interruption. You would readily excuse what defects you may discover in them, if you knew that tender concern for your present and future happiness, by which every sermon, and every page has been dictated. They have often been mingled with prayers and with tears; and my heart is so full of affection to you, that it is with great difficulty, that I forbear enlarging, more than the proper limits of such an address will admit.

As for you, my Leicestershire friends, amongst whom my ministry was opened, and the first years of it were delightfully spent, I cannot forget, and I hope you have not forgotten, that intimate and pleasing friendship, with which we were once almost daily conversing; the sweet counsel we have often taken together in private, as well as the pleasure with which we have gone to the house of God in company. All these sermons, but the second and fifth of them were first drawn up for your service, and preached to you; and much of that tenderness for you, which gave birth to them, has been rising afresh in my mind, while I have been taking this review of them. I hope they were not then like water unprofitably spilt on the ground, and that the perusal of them may revive impressions made by the first hearing. Intermediate years have introduced new scenes; and some of us who were then in the morning of life, are now risen up to the meridian of it.



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Providence has conducted many of you into new relations; and it is my pleasure to observe, in how honourable and how useful a manner several of you are filling them up with their proper duties.

While you are yourselves instances of the happy consequences, which attend a religious education, I hope you will be singularly careful, that your descendents may share in the like advantages; and I shall heartily rejoice, if these sermons, or those I have formerly published, may be of any assistance to you in those pious cares. God has put an early period to the lives of some, who, when I was amongst you, were the growing hopes of the respective congregations to which they belonged. Several of them have died while these sermons were transcribing. May the thought quicken you in the improvement of so uncertain a life; and may divine grace render some things, peculiarly intended for the use of those who are now beyond the reach of such an address, serviceable to others, into whose hands they may fall!

I greatly rejoice in the goodness of God to you, in setting over you such able and faithful shepherds, as those worthy ministers of Christ, under whose care you now are; and I heartily pray, that you and they may long be spared, as comforts to each other, and as blessings to the church. Though I am providentially separated from you, may I still hear that you walk worthy of the Lord; and may every advancing year, and revolving day of life, ripen us more for that happiness, which we hope ere long to share

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with each other, in the house of our heavenly father !

If any of you, who were once my care and my hope, have now forsaken the ways and the God of your fathers, and turned aside to the paths of licentiousness and folly, I now repeat the admonitions which I have formerly given you, that these things will, to you above all others, be bitterness in the end. And I intreat you, that if you have any little regard still remaining, for one to whom some of you have professed not a little, you would at least attentively peruse the sixth of these discourses, as containing reflections, which must, sooner or later, pierce your hearts, with penitential remorse, or everlasting despair. Oh, that divine grace might concur with it to prevent your ruin, and might give me to see you as wise, as religious, and as happy, as those excellent parents once wished you, whose eyes are now closed in the dust : whose precepts and examples, charges and tears, you seem long since to have forgot !

As for you, my dear friends here at home, I have the pleasure of conversing so often with you, that it is the less necessary now to address you at large. Yet it is but justice to you thus publicly to declare, that, amidst all that goodness and mercy, which has followed me all my days, there is no providence, which I more gratefully own, than that which brought me hither : nor does any thing contribute more to make my ministry here comfortable, than the Spirit of seriousness which discovers itself in many young

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persons amongst us. Oh, that it were as universal, as in some it is amiable and exemplary ! Permit me to remind you, that, as your remarkable importunity was the consideration, which turned the scales for my coming hither, after they had long hovered in uncertainty, so you are under some peculiar obligations to study the ease and comfort of my life, which you can never so effectually secure, as by the holy regularity of your own. Our aged friends are dropping away apace ; nay, the graves have swallowed up many, very many of your own age, who, but a few months ago, promised long and extensive usefulness here. It is you that are to comfort me under these sorrows. I can solemnly say, that I had much rather be numbered amongst them, than live to see the glory of practical religion lost in this society, while it is under my care. Remember, that, under God, you are its support ; and remember, that the high hopes you have given me, would make a disappointment sit so much the heavier upon my heart.

But I will not conclude with any thing so uncomfortable, as the mention of a disappointment from you ; but rather with recommending you, and those to whom I have formerly stood in the like relation, to the care of Christ, the great shepherd of the sheep, and to the influence of that gracious spirit, who can cause you to grow in knowledge and piety like the grass, and like willows by the water-courses. A generous friend \* is intending some of you

\* Wm. Coward, Esq.

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a present of that course of sermons, which I am now preaching on the power and grace of Christ, and the evidences of his glorious gospel: and it much sweetens the labour of preparing them for the press, to reflect, that they are in part intended for your service. I hope you will not forget to pray for all that appear concerned for your spiritual edification and eternal happiness, and more especially for

Your most affectionate

and faithful Friend,

and Servant.

Northampton,  
Dec. 30, 1734.

P. DODDRIDGE.

# SERMONS, &c.

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## SERMON I.

*The importance of the Rising Generation.*

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PSALM xxii. 30, 31.

*A seed shall serve him, it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation: They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this.*

**I**T is a very beautiful saying of an ancient Jewish writer \*, which has its parallel amongst some of the finest of the heathen poets †, that “as of the green leaves on a thick tree, some fall and others grow; so of the generations of flesh and blood, one cometh to an end, and another is born.” In this respect the resemblance is obvious; but there is another, in which it will not always so evidently hold. We perceive not any remarkable difference between

\* Eccles. xiv. 18.

† Homer's Iliad, 2 ver. 146—149. p. ver. 463—467,  
Mus. apud. Clem. Alex. Strom. lib. VI,



the leaves of one year, and of another; they which open at the return of the spring, are commonly as large and fair as those which the preceding winter had destroyed. But it has been matter of long lamentation, that the children of men are continually sinking into deeper and deeper degeneracy. Solomon (a) denies not that the former days were better than the present, when he cautions against too curious an inquiry into the reasons why such an alteration was permitted: and those who know little else of the most celebrated writers of antiquity, can quote their complaints on this melancholy occasion. They can tell you that Homer observed, “that children are seldom better, but frequently worse, than their parents;” and they often repeat that lively and comprehensive acknowledgment of Horace †: “Our Fathers who fell short of the virtues of their ancestors, have produced us a generation worse than themselves; and our children will be yet more degenerate than we.”

These complaints and forebodings have been borrowed by every age since they were published, and are to this day borrowed by us, as what we imagine more applicable to ourselves than to those who wrote them, or to any who have already cited them. I will not say, there is universal cause for such an application; but I am sure, the face of affairs in many families, and,

(a) Eccles. viii. 10.

(b) *Ætas parentum pejor avis tulit*

*Nos nequiores, mox daturos*

*Progeniem vitiosorem.*

Horat. Lib. III. Od. VI. v. 46, &c.

may I not add, in many churches too, is abundantly sufficient not only to excuse, but to vindicate it.

In the midst of this mournful survey, the heart of every pious Israelite will tremble for the Ark of the Lord, and he will be ready to say, perhaps with an excess of solicitude and of anguish, "What will the end of these things be (a)? Surely God will utterly abandon those who so basely desert him in contempt of the clearest revelation of his gospel, and the most engaging or awakening calls of his providence. The very memory of religion will at length be lost: and when the Son of Man cometh, he will not find faith on the earth (b)."

Now there seems to be something in the very sound of the text which may relieve our minds under these gloomy apprehensions. A seed shall serve him, it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation: they shall come, and declare his name to a third succession; a people who shall be born of them. Here is an evident promise or prediction, that the knowledge and the fear of God should be propagated from one age and generation to another: and this must be an agreeable assurance, whatever the particular occasion were on which it was introduced. Were this Psalm to be considered only as relating to the calamities of David, and the wonderful deliverance which God wrought out for him, the words before us might be improved for our own consolation on the justest principles of analogy.

(a) Dan. xii. 8.

(b) Luke xviii. 8.

for if a temporal salvation granted to him were to make so deep and so lasting an impression on distant nations, and on future ages, how reasonably might the like effects be expected from that infinitely more important and extensive salvation, which is exhibited to us in the everlasting gospel.

But after all, the application of this passage of scripture, to the purposes for which I have alleged it, does not depend on so long a train of consequences: for if we attentively peruse this Psalm, and diligently survey the distress and glory which are described in the several parts of it, we must be obliged to confess, that a greater than David is here. It contains a most lively and sublime prophecy of the sufferings of the Messiah, and the exaltation with which they were to be rewarded (*a*); and particularly mentions the calling of the Gentiles into his church, and the propagation of his religion to future ages (*b*). All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord; and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee: all they who are fat upon the earth, i. e. (by a usual Hebraism) persons of eminent rank and in plentiful circumstances (*c*), shall eat and worship, (i. e) they shall pay their public homage to him, and enter themselves solemnly into his covenant, as the Jewish votaries

(*a*) See particularly, ver. 7, 14, 16, 18, 27, and seq.

(*b*) Ver. 27—31. (*c*) See Psal. lxxviii. 31. Isa. x. 16. Psal. xvii. 10, and compare Psal. xiv. 12. lxxii. 10, 11. Isa. lx. 3, 5, 10, 13. Rev. xxi. 24, all which texts speak of the submission of princes and great men to Christ.



did by eating of the sacrifices which were offered to him; and on the other hand, those that go down to the dust, i. e. who are in the most indigent circumstances, shall bow before them (a), even he that cannot keep alive his own soul (b), who is so poor that wants the necessaries of life; as if it had been said, there shall be an universal submission to him, in which the greatest and meanest shall concur. And the text assures us, that his triumphs shall be as lasting, as extensive; a future seed shall serve him; they shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation; i. e. being brought to the knowledge and the profession of the true religion, they shall be owned by God as his people: and it shall be their pious care, to declare this glorious display of his righteousness (c) to a people who shall be born of them that he has done this; that it is the hand of God which has wrought out this great salvation. And though there are not many generations mentioned here, yet other scrip-

(a) Compare Isa. xxvi. 19. Neh. iii. 18. 1 Sam. ii. 8.

(b) So the French translate this Clause, *Memes celui qui ne peut garentir sa Vie*; and so several famous commentators explain it, particularly Rivetus; *Famelici, qui non habent quo vitam sustineant*. Thus also Buchanan paraphrases on the words,

*Flectet illi poplitem  
Pauper sepulchri in limine,  
Qui membra fessis artubus languentia  
Fugiente vita vix trahit.*

It is certain the phrase here translated, "keep alive the soul," is often used for the preservation of the animal life; Gen. xix. 19. 1 Kings xx. 31. Ezek. xiii. 19. And the meat, which was purchased at so expensive a rate at the siege of Jerusalem, is said to relieve, or restore, the soul, Lam. i. 11.

(c) Compare Rom. iii. 25, 26.

tures assure us, that the kingdom of the Messiah is to be of a perpetual duration, and consequently that such promises as these are to be taken in their utmost extent. In his days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace, so long as the moon endureth; his name shall endure for ever; his name shall be continued as long as the sun; and men shall be blessed in him (a).

Upon the whole then, it appears, that the words of the text are a prophecy, that the kingdom of Christ shall be perpetual, and extend itself to the latest generations, as well as the remotest climates; and, through the divine goodness, we must acknowledge, that this day is this scripture in part fulfilled among us. We dwell in a country, which, with regard to Judea, lay at the ends of the earth, and which was long over-run with barbarity and idolatry; yet we are now instructed in the knowledge of the God of Israel, and are this day assembled for his worship; so that at the distance of more than two thousand years from the publication of this prediction, we are the living witnesses of its truth; being ourselves a seed who profess to serve the Lord, and accounted to him for a generation.

I hope it is the concern of many of us, that the concluding words may be fulfilled in those who come after us; that his gospel righteousness may so be declared to them, that they likewise might be engaged to serve the Lord, not only in the external forms of the true religion, but

with the affections of the heart, and the obedience of the life.

That this concern may be more deep, more active and more universal, it will be the business of my present discourse, to represent to you at large the importance of the rising generation. And here I would aim, not merely at the demonstration of a speculative truth, which may leave your minds as cold and as irregular as it found them; but I would labour, by the divine assistance, to possess you with such a sense of the case, as may have a powerful influence on your temper and behaviour; that so our meditations on this excellent promise may through the concurrence of God, be the means of its more complete accomplishment.

I am now particularly concerned that you, my younger brethren, may be impressed with what I say: I shall therefore address myself directly to you, and endeavour to shew how important and desirable it is, that you be early tinctured with the sense of religion, and heartily engaged in the service of God.

May the spirit of God, in the mean time, so speak to your hearts, as that life and energy might be added to those convictions which I am confident, your reason will not be able to oppose!

Now I would intreat you, on this occasion, seriously to consider the importance of your character and behaviour, with regard both to yourselves and others.

I. Nothing can be of greater importance,

with regard to yourselves, than your being early engaged in the service of God.

It is a consideration, which equally concerns you, and others of a more advanced age, that religion is, generally speaking, the surest way we can take to be happy in this world, and, through the merits and righteousness of a Redeemer, the only way to glory in another; so that as the apostle expresses it, godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come (a).

Its tendency to promote our present comfort and happiness, will abundantly appear from the influence which it has on our external circumstances, and on the temper of our minds. As to the former of these, I might enlarge on its beneficial effects with regard to health and reputation, estate and friendship; and as to the latter, nothing is more obvious than that it tends to secure the tranquillity and the pleasure of the soul, as it either suppresses or moderates, those turbulent passions which throw it into anguish and confusion, while it gives abundant exercise to those which are most sweet and delightful. Such is the immediate blessedness of the man who feareth the Lord, and delighteth greatly in his commandments (b.) And who-soever reflects on the evidence with which each of these particulars is attended, must acknowledge, that the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace (c).

(a) 1 Tim. iv. 8. (b) Psal. cxii. 1. (c) Prov. iii. 17.

To complete the argument, it is to be considered, that these pleasant and peaceful paths lead up to the paradise of God : for invariable truth and goodness has engaged, that to them who, by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, he will render eternal life (*a*).

On the other hand, if you go on in the neglect of God and religion, it is very possible you may be undone for this world, as thousands have been, by debauchery and folly : or, under some restraints of common prudence, which may secure you from that, if you do not violently over-bear the voice of conscience, it will often disquiet and torment you by its remonstrances and exhortations ; till in a little time death will remove you to the seats of horror, where the worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched (*b*). For God has solemnly declared, that he will render indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, to every soul of man that doeth evil (*c*) ; when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those that know not God, and obey not the gospel (*d*).

Are not the youngest of you concerned in such declarations as these ? And if you are, let conscience say, whether you are to be despised ? It evidently appears, the question is this : shall you spend your days upon earth like rational creatures, in the noblest enjoyment of God, and of yourselves till you rise to the

(*a*) Rom. ii. 7.

(*b*) Mark ix. 44.

(*c*) Rom. ii. 8, 9.

(*d*) 2 Thes. i. 7, 8.



glories and pleasures of the heavenly world? Or shall you live like idiots and like brutes, in the amusements of a vain imagination, and the indulgence of the meanest appetites, till you sink for ever under all the shame and remorse of a polluted guilty mind, and the almighty vengeance of an incensed God? And can you be so stupid as to imagine this question will bear a debate, or that any of the little interests of time and sense are to be regarded, while these things are forgotten? Surely, I may say, with the utmost propriety, as Moses to the children of Israel (*a*), I have this day been setting before you life and death, a blessing and a curse, choose which shall be your portion; but make the choice as those that remember, it is not a vain thing for you, because it is your life (*b*).

“It is true,” you may perhaps reply in your own minds, “these are solid arguments to prove, that religion is to be attended to, sooner or later; but, it will not appear from them, that it is peculiarly the concern of the rising generation.” I answer in one word, (as you have often heard more at large), if it is to be regarded at all, it should be regarded immediately; because all the futurity you presume upon is utterly precarious. The uncertainty of human life, and our entire dependence on that sacred spirit, who is perfectly free in all his operations, concur to demonstrate, beyond all possibility of contradiction, the madness of delay; and the ruin of thousands bears testimony to it. I might add, that there are many pecu-

(*a*) Deut. xxx. 19.

(*b*) Deut. xxxii. 47.

liar advantages of early piety, which render it vastly preferable to a late repentance, even supposing it were as certain, as it is dubious: but I shall not enter into the enumeration of them now, since I intend them for the subject of a distinct discourse \*. What I have already said may be sufficient to convince you, if you allow yourselves to reflect, that your own present and future happiness is apparently concerned in the case before us. I add,

II. That it is of great importance to the happiness of others, that you of the rising generation be early tinctured with a sense of religion, or in the language of the text, be a seed who shall serve the Lord.

And here I would shew at large,—that the happiness of all who converse with you may be considerably influenced by your character and behaviour;—that the comfort of your pious parents and ministers is peculiarly concerned in it;—and that the propagation of religion to them who are yet unborn, does under God, most evidently depend upon you.

1. The happiness of all who converse with you will be considerably influenced by your character and behaviour.

They who have any sense of religion themselves will be tenderly concerned for your hap-

\* Mr Jennings's excellent sermon on this subject, amongst his other discourses to young people, has prevented the publication of the sermon here referred to. I hope my young friends will furnish themselves with those condescending and useful pieces, if there be any of them that have not yet done it.

piness. They will rejoice to see you going on in those ways which must surely lead to it; and they will be heartily grieved to see you chusing your own misery, and rejecting the counsel of God against yourselves (a). And others of a humane and generous temper, though destitute of the principles of true piety, will be solicitous for the honour, the comfort, and the usefulness of your lives.

But besides this pleasure or uneasiness, which will redound to such persons, in consequence of these friendly and benevolent sentiments, you ought to consider, that all who converse with you may find their happiness increased or diminished, by your regard to religion, or your neglect of it, as your behaviour to them will be influenced by it.

If you be early delivered into the mould of the gospel, you will quickly learn you were not born for yourselves. The mercies of God, and the example of a Redeemer, will teach you to exert yourselves to the utmost for the service of mankind, and to do good to all as you have opportunity (b). And in how many instances may your pious and charitable cares be effectual for the benefit of your fellow-creatures! In the series of life, how many in the depths of poverty may be relieved by your liberality! How many in perplexed and intricate circumstances may be guided aright by your prudent counsel! How many weeping eyes may be dried, and how many mourning hearts revived, by your tender sympathy and friendly con-

(a) Luke vii. 30.

(b) Gal. vi. 10.



dolence ! And if there be already in your natural temper a tendency towards such expressions of humanity, how happily may it be directed and enlivened, when divine and evangelical motives are brought in to its assistance !

But farther, your christian charity will teach you to be, above all things, solicitous for the spiritual and eternal happiness of those about you. And who can say, how much you may promote it ! How many more aged christians may be excited to shake off their indolence, and quicken their pace when they observe your ardency and zeal ! And how happily might your piety tend to awaken, and reclaim those, who are going on in the paths of the destroyer : how amiable would the graces of christianity appear, as exemplified in you, amidst all the insnaring allurements of childhood and youth ! And how affecting might it be to other young people to hear religion recommended to them, not only by their parents and ministers, but by their brethren and companions !

Thus useful might you be in your earliest years, and as you were advancing in age and experience, your usefulness might be daily increasing ; and if God should spare you to the decline of life, you might bring forth much nobler fruits in old age, than you could have done. if your entrance on a religious life had been deferred to that unseasonable time.

Thus may the whole period of your life be filled up with eminent service. And I will add, that your beneficial influence may extend far beyond the circle of your personal converse :

you may be blessings to your country, indeed to the whole world, by drawing down the favour of God upon it, in part, as a crown of your piety, and an answer to your prayers. But,

On the contrary, if you neglect religion, you will deprive the world of all those benefits, which it may otherwise expect from you. If you are naturally covetous, you will probably indulge that unworthy temper, so as to withhold relief from those to whom it is most justly due: or if you be of a liberal disposition, your generosity will degenerate into prodigality; or perhaps you will squander away so much of your estates in vanity and debauchery, as to throw yourselves out of a capacity of assisting those, whom you most sincerely pity, and would gladly relieve. And as to the eternal happiness of others, it is not to be imagined that you will have any regard to it while you are negligent of your own.

Nor is this the worst; for, as hardly any are mere cyphers in life, it is much to be feared, that instead of blessings, you may prove mischiefs to the world. The licentiousness, to which corrupt nature will prompt you, may lead you by unthought of consequences, to injure and defraud, as well as to grieve and torment others. And where your behaviour is most friendly, it may be most pernicious. Instead of restoring and reclaiming the souls of your companions, you may pervert and destroy them by sinful discourses and impious examples. Thus you may draw down the vengeance of God on the places where you live,

and provoke him to send some public calamity, as a punishment for that universal degeneracy which you have abetted. So that (to close the melancholy scene) at the bar of God, and in the seats of torment, you may meet with multitudes of unhappy creatures who will cry out on you, as the fatal cause of their ruin in this world, and their condemnation in that.

By such a variety of arguments does it appear, that the happiness of those you converse with will be considerably influenced by your temper and conduct. And are you so utterly lost to all sentiments of honour and goodness, as to be unconcerned at such a consideration as this? Again.

2. The comfort and happiness of your religious parents does, in a great measure, depend on your seriousness and piety.

What I have just been saying on the former heads, will evidently prove the truth of this observation. Your pious parents have a generous concern for the happiness of others, and this will engage them earnestly to wish, that you may be blessings, and not curses, to the world about you. And their peculiar affection for you must tenderly interest them in a case, on which your happiness, both in time and eternity, depends.

If they see you under the influences of early piety, unknown pleasure will arise in their minds: they will rejoice in it, not merely as it will be a security to them of a respectful and

grateful treatment from you; but as it will through grace, secure to you their dear offspring, the entertainments of a religious life, and the prospects of a glorious immortality.

These reflections will give them inexpressible pleasure in a variety of circumstances. Their daily converse with you will be more agreeable to them, than it could otherwise be, when they discern the lively impressions of religion upon your spirits, and perceive that you have a relish for those truths and promises of the gospel, which are their joy and song in the house of their pilgrimage (a). It will sometimes add a sweetness to the social exercises of devotion, to think that your souls are engaged with theirs, and regaled with the same sublime and transporting entertainments. And when they have reason to apprehend that you are retired for the duties of the closet, it will cheer their hearts to think, "Now is my child with his heavenly Father. Now has he separated himself from those vain amusements, which most of the same age pursue, that he may converse with God and his own soul, and be prepared for the business and the pleasures of Heaven. And I hope God is smiling upon him, and teaching him, by happy experience, that those pious labours are not in vain."

With such consolations will their hearts be supported in all the occurrences, which providence may allot, either to you, or them, If they meet with prosperity in their worldly affairs, and have a prospect of leaving you in

plentiful circumstances, it will be a satisfaction to them to think, that they shall not consign their estates to those who will meanly hoard up the income of them, or throw it away in foolish and hurtful lusts; but to persons who will consider themselves as the stewards of God, and will endeavour to use what he has given them for the honour of their Lord, and the good of mankind. Or, if they can give you but little, this thought will relieve them, that they commend you to the care of a guardian and a father, who is able abundantly to supply your necessities, and who has engaged, by the promises of his covenant, that those who fear him shall want no good thing (a). They will have the pleasure to think, that, how low soever your outward condition may be, you will be rich in grace, and in the entertainments of religion now, and in the glories of the heavenly inheritance at last. When they are themselves sinking under the decays of nature, their vigour and chearfulness will be renewed in yours: or should you be impaired by an afflictive providence, they will have the satisfaction of believing, that those afflictions proceed from a divine love, and shall at length turn to your advantage. It will revive their hearts in their dying moments to think, that when they are sleeping in the dust, you will stand up in their places, and support the interest of God in the world, with a fidelity and zeal perhaps superior to theirs. Or if an afflictive stroke should take you away before them, they will not mourn over your grave,

(a) *Psalm xxxiv. 9. lxxxiv. 11.*



as those that have no hope (a). Faith will teach them to mingle praises with their tears, while it assures them, that though dead to them, you are living with God in glory; that you are preferred to an attendance on his throne above, where they may hope shortly to meet you on the most advantageous terms.

This is but a faint and imperfect description of the satisfaction which your parents would find in your early piety. And it follows from hence, as a necessary consequence, that if they see you grow up in the neglect of religion, it will pierce their hearts with proportionable sorrow.

It is possible, that you may arrive at such a daring degree of wickedness, as to treat them with negligence and contempt, or perhaps to answer all their melting expostulations with insults and rage. Such ungrateful and rebellious monsters we have heard of; and would to God, that every parent in this assembly could say, that he had only heard of them! But should you preserve some sense of humanity and decency; nay, should you behave towards them in the most dutiful, and obliging manner, yet they must still mourn over you; and even your tenderness and complaisance to them, would sometimes come in to add a more sensible anguish to their affliction. It would cut them to the heart to think, that such dear, and, in other respects, amiable children, were still the enemies of God, and the heirs of destruction. When they heard the vengeance of God denounced against sin-

(a) 1 Thess. iv. 13.

ners, and read the awful threatenings of his word, they would tremble to think, that those terrible thunders were levelled against you. How little could they rejoice in that health, or plenty, which they saw you were abusing to your aggravated ruin ! And how would they be terrified when any distemper seized you, lest it should be the messenger to bear you away to eternal misery ! If they were themselves dying, how mournfully must they take their leave of you, in an apprehension of seeing you no more till the day of accounts, and seeing you then in ignominy and horror at the left hand of the judge ! Or if they saw you removed by an early death, to what hopeless sorrows would they be abandoned ! With what unknown agonies would they adopt that pathetic lamentation of David, Oh my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom, would to God I had died for thee ! Oh Absalom my son, my son (*a*) !

By such a variety of considerations does it appear, that the comforts and happiness of your pious parents does very much depend upon your temper and behaviour. And the argument is confirmed by the repeated testimony of the wisest of men, under the influences of the divine spirit. He tells us again and again, that a wise son maketh a glad father (*b*) ; that whoso loveth wisdom rejoiceth his father (*c*) , and that the father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice ; and he that begetteth a wise child, shall have joy of him (*d*) . On the other hand, he tells us,

(*a*) 2 Sam. xviii. 33.

(*b*) Prov. x. 1, xv. 20.

(*c*) xxix. 3.

(*d*) xxiii. 24.

that a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother' (*a*). And though the tenderness of her sex may make the mother peculiarly sensible of the affliction, yet it is not confined to her; for he tells us elsewhere, that a foolish son is a grief to his father, as well as bitterness to her that bare him (*b*); yea, a foolish son is the calamity of his father (*c*). And once more, he that begetteth a fool, doth it to his sorrow; and the father of a fool has no joy (*d*); for the wickedness of his son impairs his relish for the other enjoyments of life.

Such a multitude of passages to the same purposes seem intended to teach us the importance, as well as the certainty of the argument. And it is more than hinted at in those remarkable words; My son, if thy heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine (*e*). As if he had said, make a serious pause, and diligently weigh the importance of that thought, that thy piety will be an inexpressible joy to me, to thy father. And then, as if that were not enough, it is immediately added, yea, my reins also shall rejoice, (shall feel unutterable pleasure diffusing itself through all the secret recesses of my soul), when thy lips speak right things (*f*), which may manifest an heart under the influence of prudence, and of religion.

And let me intreat you, my friends, to reflect for a few moments on the weight of the argu-

(*a*) Prov. x. 1.

(*b*) xvii. 25.

(*c*) xix. 13.

(*d*) xvii. 21.

(*e*) Prov. xxiii. 15. See the

like emphatical form of speaking, ver. 24, 25.

(*f*) Ver. 16.



ment, that you may judge whether it will not bear all the stress which Solomon lays upon it! The happiness of your parents is in question; and can you slight that? Consider how much you owe to your parents, as they were the instruments of your being, and have been, under God, the principal support of it. Think of the tenderness with which they watched around your cradles, and of the many kind offices which they performed for you in your helpless infancy; which parental tenderness made delightful to them, when hardly any thing else could have made them tolerable. Think how liberally they have long contributed towards the supply of your wants; and in how many instances they have denied themselves that they might gratify you. Think how they have rejoiced with you in your joys, and mourned with you in your sorrows; how they have been terrified at your real dangers; and perhaps often disquieted with those timorous apprehensions, which fondness, rather than reason has suggested to them. And under the impression of these reflections, say, whether it may not reasonably be expected, that you should have a most affectionate regard to their repose and comfort, and think with horror of becoming their grief and their torment.

I may add, that as the parents of some amongst you are declining under the infirmities of age, and on that account the objects of a respectful compassion to all, they should be so especially to you who are their children; for it may be, these infirmities have been hastened upon them by an excess of tenderness and concern for you.

And will you add afflictions to the afflicted, and bring down with sorrow to the grave (a) those venerable hoary heads, which you have perhaps made grey before their time? Surely you must abhor the thought, or God and man must abhor you.

But I would not entertain so harsh a suspicion; I charitably hope, that you are not only impressed with this consideration, but will likewise be somewhat concerned, when you hear.

3. That the comfort and happiness of faithful ministers will be greatly affected by the character of the rising generation.

St John assures the elect lady, that he rejoiced greatly, when he found her children walking in the truth (b); and a variety of arguments concur to prove, that no pious minister can be indifferent in the case before us.

If we have any thing of humanity and generosity in our tempers, we must be concerned for your seriousness, on account of that influence which it has on the happiness of all about you, and particularly on that of your christian parents. Many of them are the ornaments and glory of our assemblies, and the most dear and intimate of our friends; we are obliged therefore to take part with them in their sorrows and their joys, with relation to you their children. It must sensibly afflict us to see, that while their wisdom and their piety might command the reverence and the love of all that know them, enemies should arise up against them out of their own houses, and even the children of their

(a) Gen. xlii. 38.

(b) 2 John ver. 4.

bowels should prove their tormentors. Those dear children, from whom they fondly promised themselves the delight and support of their declining years. And when they come and tell us the tender story, when they freely open to us their sorrows and their fears on your account, and earnestly beg our prayers for you, that whatever they suffer, you may not be for ever undone, we are hardly able to stand it; but nature, as well as religion, teaches us to echo back their sighs and to return their tears.

Thus we are concerned that the rising generation, as we sympathize with those whose happiness is apparently affected by it: but besides this, you may easily apprehend, that much of the comfort of our lives does immediately depend upon it. And this will be peculiarly obvious with regard to those of us who are in our younger years, and are entering on the work of God amongst you \*.

Should God spare us to future years, we must expect to survive many of our aged friends; and when your parents are gone, whether must we look for the comfort of our remaining days, but to you their children? And must it not wound us to the heart, to see a generation of vipers rising up, instead of those pious friends, with whom we have taken sweet counsel together, and gone to the house of God in company (a)? Can we easily bear to see the temples and altars of God forsaken, or to see them attended only

\* N. B. This was the case of the author when this sermon was preached at Kibworth, May 18, 1724.

(a) Psal. lv. 14.

by wretched hypocrites who wear the form of godliness, while they are strangers and enemies to the power of it (*a*)? Must we lose the pleasure of addressing you in public, as the christians, on the most comfortable and joyful subjects of discourse; and be obliged continually to speak to you in thunders, as those who have no right to the consolations of the gospel? Or must we never have the satisfaction of conversing with you in private, as our brethren in the Lord, and our companions in the way to heaven?

Well might it grieve us to be thus left alone in the midst of a degenerate world; especially when we reflect, that the cause of God was sinking in the time of our administration, and serious religion was lost amongst us, whilst the cultivation of it was committed to our care. Shall we not be suspected of unfaithfulness to God, and to you, if it die in our hands? That were dreadful indeed, May the divine grace preserve us from that guilt! And I trust, my brethren, that it will preserve us; and, in dependence upon that, I plainly tell you, that while God continues us in a capacity of doing it, we will honestly warn you, we will seriously expostulate with you, we will earnestly pray for you; and if it be all in vain, we will appeal to an omniscient God, that your destruction is not chargeable upon us, but upon yourselves.

But in the mean time, it would be dreadful to reflect, that while we are thus endeavouring to deliver our own souls, we are in effect heaping aggravated damnation on yours; while every

attempt is resisted by you, and so brings you under a greater load of guilt. You may indeed be insensible of the load now, but we foresee the day when you will sink under it. And here is the extent of our sorrow ; in such views as these we fear that when the ministers of former generations shall appear before their judge with a train of happy souls ; which have been conducted to heaven by their means, it must be our melancholy part to stand out as witnesses against our hearers, that we have stretched out our hands all the day long to a disobedient and gainsaying people (*a*). Oh, how shall we be able to advance this dreadful testimony against the children of our dearest friends, against those whom we tenderly loved, and whose salvation we would have purchased with any thing but our own ! yet this is our prospect with regard to you ; and we may leave it to you to judge, whether it must not sadden our souls.

Now pardon me, my friends, if I tell you, that we may reasonably expect, that an argument of this nature should not be despised. I hope it is no breach of modesty to say, that we have not deserved so ill at your hands, as that our joy, or our distress, should be indifferent to you. In all the common affairs of life we would cheerfully serve you to the utmost of our power, and therefore at least reasonably expect to stand on a level with the rest of your friends in like circumstances. And our character as ministers, if we be careful to answer it, gives us some peculiar claim to your regard. For you



we give up many more splendid prospects in life, which in other employments, we might possibly have secured ; for you we lay out our time and our strength, in study, in prayer, and in preaching. We bear you upon our hearts in our public ministrations and our private retirements ; (and God is witness with what sincerity.) Nor would we refuse those laborious services, which in human probability, might hasten upon us the infirmities of age, and the approach of death, if they might be the happy means of your conversion and salvation. And is this the reward of all our friendly care ? to weaken our hands, to grieve our souls, and to behave in such a manner, that the more tenderly we love you, the more deeply we must be afflicted by you.

Many of you treat us with a great deal of humanity and decency ; with the appearance of affection and esteem. You are ready to serve us in the common offices of friendship, and would express your resentment if you saw us injured in actions or in words. We thankfully acknowledge your goodness in such instances as these ; but permit us to ask you, why you will not be so kind and so grateful to us, as to take care of your own souls, when nothing could oblige us more than such a care, and nothing can afflict us more than the neglect of them ? Let me conclude this head with those pathetic words of the apostle, if there be any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye your joy (a). And let me intreat you to consider, once more,

(a) Phil. ii. 1, 2.



4. That the propagation of religion to future generations does, under God, chiefly depend upon you.

For this reason the pious Israelites are represented, as resolving to declare the wonderful works of God unto their children, that the generation to come might know them, even the children that should be born that they might arise, and, in their turn, declare them unto their children (a), and so the entail might be carried on to the remotest ages.

Now, my brethren, it is evident, that the propagation of religion to succeeding generations, does, humanly speaking, depend on you and others, who, with you are entering upon life. If you are under the influences of serious godliness you will carry them along with you to the end of your days; and when God calls you into families of your own, it will be your desire that you and your houses may serve him (b). Family prayer, and family-instruction will be maintained; you will be teaching your children to know the Lord, and exhorting them to serve him, and praying for a blessing on those endeavours; and who knows what a remarkable blessing might attend them? Your children, under the impressions of such an education, may be eminent for religion, as you have been. They may be equally diligent in the care of their posterity, and God may favour them with equal success; and so there may be thousands of your remote descendents who never saw you, nor perhaps heard of your

(a) Psalm lxxviii. 4,—6. (b) Josh. xxiv. 15.

name, who yet, under God, may owe their religion and their happiness to you. The prospect of it may now afford you a sensible pleasure; and it is highly probable, that when they meet you in the regions of the invisible world, such an important obligation may engage them to treat you with peculiar respect and affection; as surely all other obligations will appear trifling when compared with this.

On the other hand, if you neglect religion yourselves, it cannot be thought you will be much concerned to transmit it to others. You would hardly be at the pains to give them good instructions; supposing you much more capable of doing it than you can expect to be: or if you do attempt it, those instructions will be like to have little effect, when they are contradicted by the daily language of your example. Nay, it is possible, you may arrive at such a height of wickedness, as directly to oppose practical godliness, and breed up your children in the contempt of it, which is often to be seen even in this christian country. And what do you think will become of such children as these? If you have been so wicked, notwithstanding all the restraints of a serious education, what will they be, who miss of the advantages you enjoyed, and must be exposed to numberless temptations from which you were free? Shall these be a seed to serve the Lord? Shall these be accounted to him for a generation? It might almost as well be expected, that a race of men should spring up in a desert, where no human creature ever appeared before them, as that

true christianity should be propagated in the world by the children of such an education.

And have you, after all, so utter an indifference to the honour of that Redeemer, into whose religion you were baptized, and whose name you bear, as that you could be contented it should be lost in the world? Was it for this, that the Son of God descended from heaven that he might publish the gospel covenant, and expired on the cross that he might establish it? Was it for this that the pious labours of our ancestors have transmitted this religion to us through so many succeeding ages; and so many martyrs have sealed it by their sufferings, and their blood. Was it for this, that our sacred liberties have been so courageously asserted by the best of men, and almost miraculously defended by the hand of God? For this that the precious intail should be cut off by us, and this invaluable treasure, the charge and the glory of so many former generations, should perish in our hands? That the name of christianity should, for the future, be lost in the world; or which is altogether as bad, that it should sink into an empty name, and a lifeless circle of unmeaning forms? Yet, humanly speaking, this must be the consequence, if you, and others of the rising generation, will not heartily engage in the interests of it.

Such a variety of arguments concur to prove the great importance of the rising generation. They are so plain and so weighty, that I cannot but think, that you, my brethren, to whom I have particularly applied them, are in your con-

sciences convinced, that they are not to be disputed.

How that conviction should work, I have not time largely to shew you ; but if it be seriously and deeply impressed on your minds, you cannot long be at a loss for proper directions, among so many pious friends, and excellent books ; especially if you consult the scripture, and seek for the teachings of the blessed spirit. To these assistances I heartily recommend you, and omitting many other reflections which would naturally arise, shall conclude my discourse with one which I shall immediately address to another part of my auditory.

### REFLECTION.

How solicitous should we be in our endeavours for the religious Improvement of the rising generation, since its character appears of so great importance !

We have all our concern in the thought, but I would peculiarly recommend it to those of you, who are parents and masters, or have the education of youth under any other capacities : imagine not, my friends, that it is an inconsiderable charge which is lodged in your hands. Providence has intrusted to you the hopes and the fears, the joys and the sorrows, of many hearts, and of many families. Future generations will have reason to applaud or detest your memory, as your present duty is regarded or neglected ; and, which is infinitely more, the father of the spirits of all flesh will require

a strict account of those precious souls which he committed to your care.

It is not for me, at this time, to direct you at large, as to the particulars of your duty with regard to them\*. In the general you will easily apprehend that some methods are to be taken to inform their minds with divine knowledge, and to impress them with an affecting sense of what they know. And if you find the work attended with great difficulty, I hope it will engage you thankfully to accept of the assistances of ministers, and other christian friends, and earnestly to implore those communications of the Spirit, which are absolutely necessary to make them effectual.

And if God have any mercy in store for so sinful a nation as ours, we may humbly hope, that, in answer to our united supplications, he will receive his work amongst us in the midst of the years (*a*); and according to the tenor of his promises, will pour out his spirit on our seed, and his blessing on our offspring; so that they may spring up before him as the grass, and as willows by the water courses; and calling themselves by the name of Jacob, and subscribing with their hands unto the Lord (*b*), may be acknowledged by him as a generation of his people. AMEN.

\* Something of this kind I have since attempted in the *Sermons on the Religious Education of Children*, which will now be reprinted in the same form with these; though I have there been obliged to repeat some thoughts which occur here, tho' in different words and in a different view.

(*a*) Hab, iii. 2.

(*b*) Isa. xlv. 3—5.



## SERMON II.

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*Christ formed in the soul, the only foundation of hope  
for Eternity.*

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GAL. iv. 19.

*My little children of whom I travail in birth again,  
until Christ be formed in you.*

**I**T was the unhappy case of Agrippa, that though almost, he was only almost, persuaded to be a christian (*a*); and I fear it is now the case of many, and particularly of many young persons, who have enjoyed the advantages of a religious education. I believe it is difficult to find any amongst them, who have not been brought under some serious impressions betimes. With regard to the internal operations of the blessed Spirit, as well as external means, the morning of life is generally to them, in a peculiar sense, the day of their visitation; and they often seem to know it, and in some measure to improve it: but in too many instances, we find

(*a*) Acts xxvi. 28.



their goodness as a morning cloud, and as the early dew, which soon passeth away (*a*). The blossoms open fair and beautiful, and give a very agreeable prospect of the plentiful fruits of holiness in life, but too often when storms of temptation and corruption arise, the goodly appearance is laid in ruins; the blossoms do as it were fall to the ground, and leave the tree blasted and naked; or at best covered only with leaves of an external profession, which however green and flourishing they may for the present be, will not at last secure it from being cut down and cast into the burning. Though they for a while had escaped the pollutions of the world through lust, they are afterwards entangled and subdued; and the consequence is, they prove a scandal to religion, and a discouragement to others, till, in the end, they bring aggravated destruction on themselves; so that on the whole, as the apostle most justly observes, it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than thus, after they have known it, to turn aside from the holy commandment (*b*).

This may be in a great measure owing to the mutability of human nature in general, and particularly to the levity and inconstancy of youth, in conjunction with the force of those temptations of life which continually surround and press upon them. Yet I apprehend this is not all, but that it is, in part, to be charged on something defective, even in their best days, on

(*a*) Hos. vi. 4.

(*b*) 2 Pet. ii. 21.

their resting in something short of real religion and a true saving change. Solomon had seen reason to say, there is a way that seemeth right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death (*b*): and I believe every considerate person will be ready to own, that in order to prevent so fatal a delusion, and all the train of mischiefs which may follow upon it, great care should be taken in stating this important question; "What is the true and solid basis, on which "we may securely ground our eternal hopes?" It is a question of the highest importance, and the most universal concern, both to the aged and the young; so that I trust I need not offer any apology for complying with the request of a pious and judicious friend, who recommended this subject to our consideration, at this time and on this occasion.

In prosecution of this design, I have made choice of these words of the apostle, which I have now been reading, and which may, without offering any violence to them, be very fairly and naturally accommodated to the present purpose.

It is plain from many passages in this epistle, that the great apostle, who had planted the christian church among the Galatians, had reason to fear, that many, who were by profession its members, were not sufficiently established in their holy faith. It is probable, that he himself had an opportunity of making but a short stay amongst them; and, partly through their own negligence and prejudices, and partly

through the artful attempts of false teachers, in the absence of St. Paul, they appear to have fallen into a set of notions, and a conduct, which tended, not only to impair the glory, but to subvert the very foundation of the gospel, and with it the foundation of their own eternal hopes. Of this the apostle does, in a very awful manner, admonish them. He tells them, in the very beginning of his epistle, that he marvelled that they were so soon removed from him that called them, (and from the principles he had taught them) into another gospel (*a*). And afterwards he useth these very free and emphatical words: O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched, or enchanted you, that you should not obey the truth? Are you so foolish? having begun in the spirit (having professed to embrace the gospel, and shewn the appearances of some common zeal for it,) can you now hope to be made perfect by the flesh, or by the ritual and carnal observances of the Mosaic institution? Is it thus that you disgrace all you have done, and all you have borne for Christ? Have you then suffered so many things in vain (*b*)? On the whole, he tells them, he was ready to apprehend that all the agreeable hopes he had once entertained concerning them, would be buried in everlasting disappointment, and that it would appear, he had bestowed upon them labour in vain (*c*). Thus did he stand in doubt of them (*d*); and that doubt pierced his heart with the most tender concern, and brought upon him, as

*(a)* Gal. i. 6.*(b)* Chap. iii. 1.—4*(c)* Chap. iv. 11.*(d)* Chap. iv. 20.

it were a second time, those pangs of soul which he had felt on their account, when he saw them in all the ignorance and wickedness of their gentile state. He was hardly more solicitous that they might be turned from dumb idols to the living God, than he was now, that they might give convincing evidences that Christ was formed in them, i. e. that they had cordially received and digested the gospel, and that their hearts were delivered into the mold of it (a); which it did not appear they were, while they were thus making void the grace of God, and the righteousness of faith, by adhering to the foolish and pernicious doctrine of the necessity of seeking their justification in part at least, by the observation of the Mosaic law.

This seems to be the most natural sense of the words of the text, where such a latitude of expression is used, as the apostle elsewhere seems to study, on purpose to render his writings universally edifying and useful to them, whose particular circumstances in life are widely different from those of the persons to whom they were originally addressed.

As to the introductory words, my little children, we cannot imagine they refer to the age of those to whom the apostle wrote. The evident design of them is, to express that kind of parental tenderness which he entertained for them, like that which a mother hath for an infant with which she travails in birth. My little children,

of whom I travail in birth again, till Christ be formed in you.

It would be easy to multiply observations from the words. I might especially take occasion to shew,—that it is possible those that once seemed very hopeful, and still maintain an external profession, may appear, after all, in such dangerous circumstances, that judicious ministers, and other christian friends, may be thrown into a great deal of perplexity and agony on their account,—and that the great things necessary to establish their safety, and the comfort of those concerned for them, is, that the Lord Jesus Christ be formed in them.

That I may more particularly illustrate and improve the text, and take in what is most important in these remarks, I will

I. Consider several things on which men are ready to build a false confidence, which will bring them into danger, and their judicious friends into perplexity upon their account.

II. I will endeavour to shew you what is the only solid foundation of their own hopes, and the joys of others with regard to them; which is here expressed by Christ formed in them. And then,

III. I shall conclude with some more particular improvement, in proper inferences from the whole.

These are plainly matters of universal importance; but as I am now peculiarly addressing myself to young persons, I shall endeavour to



fix on those thoughts which may be most remarkably suitable to them: for I am much more concerned that my discourse may be useful, than that it may be critically regular and exact. I hope there are many amongst you, who are experimentally acquainted with the vitals of christianity, and have received from above an incorruptible seed (*a*). There are others to whom I must say with the apostle to these Galatians, I stand in doubt of you (*b*); and to such, I hope, I can apply myself in the language of the text, My little children of whom I travail in birth again, till Christ be formed in you. Pardon me, if in this instance I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy (*c*). I would endeavour, with the sincerest and tenderest affection, and with such freedom as the importance of the case requires, to guard you against those sandy foundations, which will bury you and your hopes deep in eternal ruins; and to direct you to the rock of ages, on which they who build shall never be ashamed.

I therefore intreat your serious attention, and would humbly ask both for myself and you, the teachings of that blessed Spirit, whose peculiar office it is, in the most efficacious manner, to shew us our danger and our remedy; to aid the labouring minds of ministers, and to cause them to see with satisfaction the travail of their souls (*d*), while he gives to their hearers a new birth and immortal life, by forming Christ in them.

(*a*) 1 Pet. i, 23.

(*b*) Gal. iv, 20.

(*c*) 2 Cor. xi, 2,

(*d*) Isa. liii, 11.



I. I am to caution you against several things on which young persons are peculiarly prone to build a false and precarious confidence.

And here let me particularly intreat you, as you love your souls, and value your eternal hopes,—that you trust not to the privileges of your birth,—or the rectitude of your speculations in matters of religion,—or the purity and frequency of your forms of worship,—or the warmth of your passions,—or the morality of your conduct; for none of these apart, nor even all of them united, can, according to the tenor of the gospel, be sufficient for your security and happiness.

1. Trust not to the privileges of your birth and education, as the foundation of your eternal hopes.

You are, many of you, the seed of God's servants, perhaps for several succeeding generations. You may be ready to plead, that you were born in his house, that you were early devoted to him in baptism, and have been brought up in the most regular and conscientious manner: you have been surrounded with holy instructions and correspondent examples from your infancy; and repeated fervent prayers, both in the family and in secret, have been sent up to heaven upon your account. These are indeed signal advantages, and you may justly rejoice in them; for in these respects you are the children of the kingdom: but rejoice with trembling, for our Lord hath told us, that it is more than a possible case, that the children of the kingdom may be cast out, and have their portion in outer

darkness (a). The peculiar regard shewn to the seed of Abraham may perhaps be abused by some of you, as an encouragement to those presumptuous hopes. But remember, that Ishmael was the son of Abraham, and Esau of Isaac; and yet neither the one nor the other, inherited the blessing of his father. Remember that beautiful, but dreadful parable, which represents a wretched creature in Hell, that could cry, Father Abraham, and yet in vain added, have mercy upon me, and send me but a drop of water to cool my tongue (b). Once more, remember those emphatical words of the Baptist, so expressly levelled against this arrogant presumption: think not (says he) to say within yourselves, we have Abraham for our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham (c), as if he should have said, "The promises made  
" to those who are the children of Abraham,  
" respect not merely them who are lineally descended from him, but those who are the heirs  
" of his piety and his faith; for if God were  
" to turn these stones into men, and to form  
" them by his grace to a holy character and  
" temper, such, though descended from no human parents at all, would, in the sense of the  
" promise, be children of Abraham. And it were more reasonable to expect such a transmutation, than that God should acknowledge a generation of vipers as his people, because they were derived from holy ancestors. On the contrary, God directly assures us, that if the son

(a) Mat. viii. 12.

(b) Luke xvi. 24.

(c) Mat. iii. 9.

of the most religious father forsake the way of virtue and holiness, and prove as the degenerate plant of a strange vine (*a*), in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die (*b*). And surely herein the ways of the Lord are apparently equal; for it is most evident, that a long descent from God's people is a reproach and condemnation, rather than an honour; to those who abandon that good old way in which their ancestors have trod, and as it were, cut off that intail of piety which has been the care and the glory of preceding generations.

2. Trust not to the regularity of your sentiments, in matters of religion, as the foundation of your eternal hopes.

So various are the workings of men's hearts, and the devices of Satan, that, if I mistake not, there are some that place their confidence in the strictness; and others in the latitude, of their religious opinions; but the one, and the other, will appear equally vain, when considered in the view now before us.

Some may possibly persuade themselves that their condition is secure, because their sentiments are orthodox. They live perhaps in the midst of the unbelieving and profane, and see daily contempt and derision thrown upon the blessed gospel, or its most glorious peculiarities; but through the influence of a good education, or from some other principle short of true piety, they may nevertheless not only hold fast the faith once delivered to the saints, but even con-

(*a*) Jer. ii, 21.      (*b*) Ezek. xviii, 10--13, 24.

tend earnestly for it (a); nay, they are, perhaps, learned in the controversies of the times; and can indeed pronounce concerning them in a very rational and accurate manner.

If this, my friends, be the case with any of you, I congratulate you on the happiness of a well-informed judgment, but must caution you against mistaking it for a sanctified heart. The mystery of faith, as the apostle himself assures us, is to be held with a good conscience (b): and in vain do you profess to retain the one, while you make shipwreck of the other. As precious a treasure as the knowledge of the truth is, if we go no farther than mere speculation, it will be to you "but as a talent of gold to a man sinking in the sea, which only serves to plunge him so much the deeper in ruin \*."

There are others who err in the contrary extreme. Orthodox notions are their banter, rather than their confidence. They pride themselves in having broke the shackles in which others are confined, and in seeing thro' the mist in which multitudes have been perplexed. They are sensible that many things which divide the world are merely controversies about words; and are not much concerned about others in which there is a real difference, because they are well aware, that the fundamentals of religion lie in a very little room. They are confident of the innocency of error, and the safety of an honest mind under those mistakes which

(a) Jude ver. 3.

(b) 1 Tim. i. 19.

\* *Dr Bates's Works*, page 938.

have been branded by the severest names. A wicked life is, in their esteem, the only dangerous heresy ; and morality the only thing that is worth contending about : charmed with their own wisdom and happiness in this freedom of thought, they look down with pity on persons under the influence of a contracted education and narrow sentiments, and possibly mingle their pity with a great deal of scorn, not to say indignation. But they are indeed themselves the objects of much juster pity, if, whilst they glory in their freedom, they are the servants of corruption (a). It is certain, that the most generous speculations will no more save men of unregenerate hearts, and unholy lives, than the most rigid and severe set of notions. For notions and speculations are in their nature so far short of real goodness, that if there be nothing more than these, it matters but little what they are. Yet one cannot forbear observing a peculiar and most absurd inconsistency in the conduct of those, who think so highly of themselves, because they are possessed of this one speculation, that speculation in general is a trifle, and morality is all ; as if the whole of morality consisted in bearing this testimony in its favour. I wish such a character were not almost as common, as it is for men to be bigots in defence of catholicism, and uncharitable in pleading the cause of charity. If this be the case with any of you, out of your own mouth must you be condemned (b) ; and we may justly apply to you in the midst of your self ap-

(a) 2 Pet: ii. 19.

(b) Luke xix. 22.



plauses, those awful words of our Lord; If ye were, in this respect, blind, ye would comparatively have no sin: whereas now you have no cloak, or excuse, for your sin (a).

3. Trust not in the external forms of devotion, as the foundation of your great hopes for eternity.

You are, it may be, joined to a society, which not only wears the christian name, but separates itself from many other professors, under the apprehension, at least, of a more pure and scriptural worship. You, perhaps, so much approve and esteem this worship, as to be diligent and constant in attending on the public exercises of it, not only in its stated returns, but on occasional opportunities. You fill your places here from time to time, not merely in obedience to the commands of your parents and governors, but by your own voluntary choice. And, it may be, to these you add the forms of family devotion morning and evening, and, possibly, a few moments of daily retirement for reading and prayer. What can such religious persons have to fear? Nay, rather, my brethren, what can you have to hope, if, while you draw near to God with your mouths and your lips, you remove your hearts far from him (b)? If while you come before him, as his people come, and present yourselves in the posture of humble worshippers, your heart be going after your covetousness (c)? God hath for ever confounded such vain presumption, by declaring, that the

(a) John ix. 41. xv. 22.

(b) Isa. xxix. 13.

(c) Ezek. xxxiii. 31.



prayer of the wicked is an abomination to him (*a*); and that his shall certainly be so, that turns away his ear from hearing the law (*b*), i. e. that refuses obedience to it. The servant that knew his Lord's will, and did it not, became justly liable to be beaten with many stripes (*c*); and it is not to be wondered, if, in this sense, judgment begin at the house of God (*d*); and seize first on those who affront and profane his ordinances, by making them to supersede the very things which they were originally appointed on purpose to promote.

4. Trust not to the warmth of your passions in matters of religion, as the foundation of your most important hopes.

Some of you, to whom I now speak; have perhaps experienced very bitter agonies of conscience. You have been roused from the sleep of carnal security, as by an earthquake, which has shook the very centre of your soul; the flames of hell have seemed, as it were, to flash in your faces; and all these mingled horrors have compelled you to cry out, "Woe is me, for I am undone! oh, what shall I do to be saved (*e*)?" And yet, to allude to the story of Elijah, the Lord hath not been in the earthquake, or in the fire (*f*). Consider to what purpose the inquiry after salvation hath been made, and with what resolution it hath been pursued: otherwise you may be fatally deceived. The murderers of Stephen were cut to

(*a*) Prov. xv. 8

(*b*) Prov. xxviii. 9.

(*c*) Luke xii. 47.

(*d*) 1 Pet. iv. 17:

(*e*) Isa. vii. 5.

Acts xvi. 30.

(*f*) 1 Kings xix. 11, 12.

the heart by his preaching (a); and we are sure that, if the most deep and terrifying convictions could have secured a man's salvation, the traitor Judas would have been safe, who undoubtedly felt the most violent convulsions of soul, before he proceeded to that dreadful extremity, which sealed him up under everlasting despair.

But you may have been impressed with the sweeter and the noble passions; you have not only trembled at the thunder of the law, but rejoiced in the message of gospel grace: the news of a Redeemer has been welcome to your souls, and the feet of those messengers beautiful, that have come to publish peace in his name (b). You have, perhaps, been melted into tears of pleasure and tenderness, when you have heard the representation of his dying love; and when the precious promises, established by it, have been unfolded, and the prospects of eternal glory displayed, your minds have been elevated and transported; so that you have hung, almost with a trembling eagerness, on the lips of the speaker.—I readily acknowledge, that such as these are frequently the workings of the blessed Spirit of God, upon the souls of his chosen people; and when found in a due connexion with the great effects they are designed to produce, are highly to be esteemed and rejoiced in. But remember, I entreat you, that every tear of tenderness, and every sally of joy, doth not arise from so divine a spring. You might weep at a mournful scene in a well-wrought tragedy, as

(a) Acts vii. 54.

(b) Isa. lii. 7.

you have done at the story of a Redeemer's sufferings: you might find yourselves transported with a fine poetical description of a Pagan Elysium, or a Mahometan Paradise, just as you have been with the views of a Heavenly Canaan, which gospel-ordinances have presented. Mere self love might be the foundation of such a joy in the tidings of pardon and happiness, without the least degree of renewing and sanctifying grace; as it probably was in those hearers, represented by the stony ground, who immediately received the word with joy, but had no root, and so endured but for a while (a).

But, perhaps, you will say, you are confident it is not merely self love in you, for you have often found your mind impressed with a grateful sense of the divine goodness; so that, when you own it before God in prayer, or converse with his saints on the copious and delightful subject, your souls flow forth in love to your great benefactor, and you look up to him in the most thankful acknowledgments of his favours.—If it be a gratitude, that captivates the soul into a willing obedience, and engages you to yield yourselves living sacrifices to God, then is Christ formed in your souls, and you are not the persons to whom I would give the alarm: on the contrary, I would rather confirm your hopes, and rejoice with you in them.—But if your gratitude does not rise to this: if it rest only in some tender emotion of mind, or some transient external expression of that emotion, I must faithfully tell you, that I fear it is only a

(a) Matt. xiii. 20, 21.

nobler degree of that natural instinct which causeth the ox to know his owner, and the ass his master's crib (a). To find your spirit in this manner impressed does indeed plainly prove that the day of your visitation is not entirely past; it proves you have not sinned yourselves into utter insensibility of soul; nay, it may possibly at length, through the communications of sanctifying grace, lead you on to real religion, and to eminent attainments in it: but at present it falls far short. I have often told you, (and one can hardly repeat it too often, or insist too earnestly upon it,) that there is a very wide difference between a good state, and a good frame; and that religion is not seated either in the understanding, or in the passions, but principally in the will; which, in this disjointed state of human nature, is far from being always in a due harmony with either. So that, on the whole, those illuminations, or those affections, on which you are apt to lay so great a stress, are, perhaps, at best, but the preparatory workings of the Spirit upon your minds, which if they are improved aright, may leave you more hard, and more miserable, than they found you.

5. Trust not to the morality of your behaviour, as the foundation of your eternal hopes.

Morality is certainly a very excellent thing, and it were scandalous indeed for any professing christian to pour contempt upon it. Wherever this is wanting, pretences to faith and christian

experience are not only vain, but insolent and detestable. He that committeth sin, is of the devil; and only he that doth righteousness, is righteous, (*a*): nor hath the grace of God ever savingly appeared to that man, through whatever uncommon scenes of thought he may have passed, who is not effectually taught by it to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly (*b*.) But it will by no means follow from thence, that wherever there is a sober and virtuous conduct, such a soul is passed from death to life. If the whole of the gospel be wrapt up in the rules of morality, then is Christ dead in vain; or, at least, it is in vain that the notices of his death are published to us. Beware, I intreat you, of so pernicious an error. I think myself obliged more earnestly to caution you against it, because, while the devil is attempting, on the one hand, to engage some, under the specious pretences of an evangelical spirit, to turn the grace of God into wantonness (*c*); he seems to be insnaring others, by extolling the virtue which he hates, in order to lead them into a neglect of Christ, and his righteousness, and all the peculiarities of the gospel-scheme of salvation; so that it is difficult on the whole to say, which of these devices is most destructive to the souls of men.

From my heart I rejoice to think, there are so many amongst you, my young friends, whose character in life is fair and unblemished. You

(*a*) 1 John iii. 7, 8.      (*b*) Tit. ii. 10, 11, 12.

(*c*) Jude ver. 4.



escape the grosser pollutions of the world; you abhor brutal intemperance; you scorn the mean artifices of deceit, and renounce the hidden things of dishonesty (a); you honour your parents and subordinate governors; you treat the ministers of Christ with respect and esteem; you are affable and courteous in your behaviour to all; and, on this account, we behold you and love you; we hope, and conclude, you are not far from the kingdom of Heaven (b). But, alas! if things rest here, you will never enter into it. All these things had the young man in the gospel observed from his youth (c); and many of you have seen in a very large and beautiful representation, how lovely a youth was then perishing in sin \*. He lacked one thing; and the lack of that was the ruin of his soul, as it will be of yours, if you are destitute of it.

I know that they are especially in danger of being deceived here, who converse frequently with persons of an abandoned character; or who are themselves reformed from some gross irregularities to which they were once addicted. Comparing themselves with others, or with themselves in a more licentious and corrupt state, they pronounce a favourable sentence, and conclude they are safe and happy; but let me intreat you, my friends, that you would rather compare your hearts and lives with that perfect law of God, which cannot be repealed; weigh yourselves in that balance, and see whether you are not found wanting there. Review even

(a) 2 Cor. iv. 2. (b) Mark xli. 34. (c) Mark x. 20.

\* Dr Watt's Serm. Vol. I. Ser. V. VI.



the upright conduct of these days of your reformation, and then say, whether there be such a redundancy of merit in them as will not only answer present demands, but atone for your past offences too. You will soon be confounded on such a review. You will soon acknowledge, on an impartial examination, that the bed is shorter than a man can stretch himself upon, and the covering narrower than he can wrap himself in (*a*); that neither you, nor any living, can be justified by the works of the law (*b*).

I will conclude this head with observing, that the instance of the blessed apostle St Paul serves well to illustrate and confirm our discourse, in each of the particulars I have now mentioned—Had the privileges of birth and education been a sufficient security, Paul had been secure before his conversion to christianity; for he was circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, (which had not, like the rest, revolted from the house of David;) and by his mother's side, as well as his father's, a Hebrew of the Hebrews (*c*).—If the exactest regularity in religious notions, or the strictest formality in the externals of worship could have secured a man, Paul had been secure: for he was, as touching the law, a Pharisee; he lived according to the rigour of that sect, and, both with respect to doctrines and ceremonies, was exceedingly zealous of the traditions of the fathers (*d*).—If a transport of passion in the cause of God could have secured a man, Paul had

(*a*) Isa. xxviii. 20.

(*c*) Phil. iii. 5.

(*b*) Rom. iii. 20.

(*d*) Gal. i. 14.

been secure; for, concerning zeal, or with regard to that, he persecuted the church, and wasted it beyond measure (a).—And, lastly; if morality of behaviour could have done it, Paul had been secure; for, touching the righteousness which is by the law, he was blameless (b). In these things he was once so weak, and so wretched, as to place a great deal of confidence; but when he was illuminated, and called by divine grace, he assures us, that what things were gain unto him before, those he counted loss for Christ, i. e. he most entirely renounced all dependence upon them. Yea, doubtless, says he, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. Which naturally leads me to the second general, where

II. I am to consider, what will be a solid foundation for hope and joy when all these precarious dependencies fail.

This is, with the utmost propriety, expressed in the text, by Christ formed in the soul; which is exactly parallel to that phrase in Colossians, Christ in you the hope of glory (c), which is there mentioned as an epitome of the gospel, the riches of the glory of the mystery preached among the Gentiles. When Paul could see that the Galatians were brought to this, the pangs of his labouring mind would be ended, and joy and confidence would succeed; which is plainly intimated in the words of the text. And when you, my dear charge, are brought to it, parents and ministers may rejoice over you, and you

(a) Gal. i. 13. (b) Phil. iii. 6—8. (c) Col. i. 27.

will have an everlasting spring of hope and joy, a solid foundation, on which to build for eternity.

Permit me, therefore, a little more particularly to explain it to you; and let me intreat you to turn your thoughts inward, that you may judge whether you have been experimentally acquainted with the temper and change which I shall now describe, as signified by this remarkable expression in the text, Christ formed in you.

Now, I think, it implies these three things : —That some apprehensions of Christ have taken hold of the heart; —that the man is brought to an explicit choice of him, and deliberately enters into covenant with him; and that in consequence of both these, something of the temper and spirit of Christ is, by divine grace wrought in his soul. I will touch on each of these; but my time will not allow me to manage them in so copious and particular a manner as they well deserve.

1. To have Christ formed in the soul supposes that some serious apprehensions of Christ have taken hold of the heart.

It evidently implies, that the external revelation of him hath not only been admitted as a speculative truth, but attended to as a matter of the highest concern. Previous to the forming of Christ in the soul, there must be a conviction that we are naturally without Christ, and that, in consequence of this, we are in a most unhappy condition. And this conviction must strike deep upon the heart; for till the evil of sin be

felt, what can make the news of a Saviour welcome? since, as he himself has declared, the whole need not a physician, but they that are sick (*a*). The man in whose heart Christ is formed, has seen himself condemned by God's righteous law; has seen himself equally unable to answer its demands, or to bear up under the execution of its penalties. And feeling this to be no light matter, but the very life of his soul, he has then been engaged, with the greatest seriousness and earnestness, to cry out, Woe is me, for I am undone (*b*)! Oh, what shall I do to be saved (*c*)? I before told you, there may be these convictions and awakenings, where Christ is never formed in the soul; and I now add, that the degree of them may be various, according to the various tempers and circumstances of different persons; but it is most evident that something of this kind must make way for the Redeemer's entrance, who comes to seek and to save that which was lost (*d*); to bind up the broken-hearted (*e*); and to give rest to the weary and heavy laden (*f*). And I the rather insist on this, because I am fully persuaded, that slight thoughts of sin, and of the misery of our natural estate by it, have been the principal cause of all the infidelity of the present age, and are daily ruining a multitude of souls.

2. The formation of Christ in the soul doth farther imply an explicit choice of him, and a deliberate entering into covenant with him.

(*a*) Mat. ix. 12.    (*b*) Isa. vi. 5.    (*c*) Acts xvi. 30.  
 (*d*) Luke xix. 10.    (*e*) Isa. lxi. 1.    (*f*) Mat. xi. 28, 29.

When such a soul hears of a Redeemer and of the way of salvation by him, exhibited in scripture, it cordially approves the scheme, as entirely worthy of its divine author; and though corrupt nature raises up a thousand proud thoughts, in a vain and ungrateful rebellion against it, yet they are, by Almighty Grace, subdued and brought into captivity (*a*). The man really sees such a suitableness; and such an amiableness in the blessed Jesus, under the character in which the gospel reveals him, that he judges him to be the pearl of great price; and as God has laid him as the foundation-stone, he is, in that view, inconceivably precious to him (*b*). Far from contenting himself with applauding this plan, as regularly beautiful, and magnificent in general, the true believer is solicitous, that he may have his own share in this edifice of mercy: and that, coming to Christ as a living stone, he may himself be one of those, who shall, on him, be built up for an habitation of God through the Spirit (*c*). When he considers the Lord Jesus represented as standing at the door and knocking (*d*), it is with pleasure that he hears his voice, and opens to him, and, as Zaccheus did, receives him joyfully (*e*). He regards him as a nail fastened in a sure place (*f*); on which he can joyfully fix all his eternal hopes, infinitely important as he sees them to be. And while he thus anchors his soul on the righteousness, the atonement, and the intercession of a Redeemer, he humbly bows

(*a*) 2 Cor. x. 5.    (*b*) 1 Pet. ii. 6.    (*c*) Eph. ii. 22.  
(*d*) Rev. iii. 20,    (*e*) Luke xix. 6,    (*f*) Isa. xxii. 23.



to his authority, as his Lord and his God (*e*). It is his desire to seat him on the throne in his heart, and as it were, to put into his hand the sceptre and the sword, that all the powers of nature may be governed, and all the corruptions of it destroyed by him. In a word, as he knows that Christ was given for a covenant to the people (*f*), he deliberately sets his seal to that covenant, thereby devoting himself to Christ, and through him, to the father. Such are his views, his purposes and his engagements; and by divine grace he is enabled to be faithful to them. Which leads me to add,

3. When Christ is formed in any soul, something of the temper and character of the blessed Jesus is, by divine grace, wrought there.

I might with ease multiply scriptures in proof of the absolute necessity of this; but it is so obvious, that you must yourselves know, how expressly it is required. You know, how plainly St. Paul has told us, that if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his (*g*): and where the spirit resides Christ dwells in the heart (*h*). The same mind, or temper, is in such an one, as was also in Christ Jesus (*i*); and as he professeth to abide in him, it is his care so to walk, as Christ also walked (*k*). On which account the true christian is said to have put on Christ (*l*), in allusion to the Hebrew phrase of being clothed with any temper or affec-

(*e*) John xx, 28, (*f*) Isa. xlix, 8, (*g*) Rom. viii, 9,

(*h*) Eph. iii, 17, (*i*) Phil. ii, 5, (*k*) 1 John ii, 6,

(*l*) Gal. iii, 27;

tion, that greatly prevails or governs in the soul\*.

It is a very pleasing, as well as useful employment, to trace the lineaments of the temper and conduct of Christ in his people. Our Lord is in a peculiar sense the Son of God; but his people are, through him, taken into the same relation: for they have not received the spirit of bondage again unto fear, though perhaps they were once subjected to it, but they have received the spirit of adoption (*a*); and because they are sons, God hath sent forth the spirit of his son into their hearts, crying Abba, father (*b*). By this spirit a filial temper is wrought in their souls, by which their obedience to their heavenly father is so animated, as to be most honourable and grateful to him, as well as most easy and delightful to themselves. Under the influences of this spirit, the Christian desires it may be his character now, as he trusts it will be his happiness at last, to follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth (*c*); to follow that Jesus, who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners (*d*). He is indeed deeply sensibly, that it is impossible for him, as his Lord did, to fulfil all righteousness (*e*); and therefore, when he hath done all, he calls himself an unprofitable servant (*f*). Yet he seeth so much of the internal beauties of holiness, so much lustre

\* Thus we read of being clothed with righteousness Job xxix, 14, Psal. cxxxii, 9, With humility, 1 Pet. v. 5, With zeal, Isa. lix. 17, With cursing, Psal. cxix, 18, With shame, Psal. cxxxii, 18, &c.

(*a*) Rom. viii, 15, (*b*) Gal. iv. 6, (*c*) Rev. xiv. 4  
(*d*) Heb. vii, 26, (*e*) Matt. iii, 15, (*f*) Luke xvii, 16.

and glory in the image of God, as drawn on the soul of man, that it is the great concern of his heart, and labour of his life, to pursue it. Nor would he only abstain from grosser enormities, and practise those virtues which are most honourable amongst men, and attended with the greatest secular advantage; but he would in every respect, maintain a conscience void of offence (g), and perfect holiness in the fear of God (h). He had so affectionate a sense of the riches of the divine grace displayed through a Redeemer in adopting so unworthy a creature as himself to the dignity and privilege of a Son of God, that he often cries out, in raptures of holy gratitude and joy, What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits towards me (a)? Inspired with this noble principle, he searches his father's will impartially; and when he hath discovered it, he obeyeth it cheerfully, and it is his meat and his drink to perform it (b). He loves the Lord his God above all, and loves his fellow creatures, for his sake as well as their own, and entertains the highest veneration and affection for those who most heartily resemble his father, and their father, his God and their God. It is his prayer, and his endeavour, that he may go about doing good (c), and be useful to all as he hath opportunity (d); that he pass through the world with a holy moderation and superiority of soul, to the things which are seen, and are temporal (e); thank-

(g) Acts xxiv, 16

(h) 2 Cor. vii, 1.

(a) Psal. cxvi, 12.

(b) John iv, 34.

(c) Acts x, 38.

(d) Gal. vi, 10.

(e) 2 Cor. iv. 18.

fully owning every mercy as proceeding from God's paternal love and care, and serenely submitting to every affliction, as the cup which his father puts into his hand (*a*). In a word, he desires, that in all the varieties of life, he may still be intent on the views of an everlasting inheritance; humbly looking and longing for that blessed hope (*b*), yet willing patiently to wait his father's time: having this constant expectation, and reviving assurance, that whether he liveth, he shall live unto the Lord, or whether he dieth, he shall die unto the Lord; so that whether he live or die, he shall be the Lord's (*c*).

This is the Christian;—this is the man in whom Christ is formed: or, rather, these are some faint lineaments of his character: and I will venture to say, that he who cannot discern something in it, even as thus imperfectly described which is vastly superior to that morality and decency of behaviour, which arises merely from prudential views, or from the sweetness and gentleness of a man's natural temper, is sunk below the boasted religion of nature, and must take refuge in the wretched principles of Atheism, if he would pretend to form any thing of a consistent scheme. But now,

III. I must conclude with hinting at some reflections and inferences, which my time will not allow me to handle at large.

1. How important is it, that ministers should lead young persons into such views as these!

(*a*) John xviii. 11.

(*b*) Tit. ii. 13.

(*c*) Rom. xiv. 8.

Our great and important business in life is to promote the eternal happiness of our hearers, and to lay a solid foundation of hope and joy in their souls. We have seen now what it is, and other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ (a). Here then let all our labours centre. It is the good old way in which our fathers in the ministry went, and in which they prospered. Let us follow their steps, and exert our most vigorous efforts here. Modern refinements may amuse us in our closets, but they will never feed the souls of our hearers, nor spread the triumphs of a gospel, which was the power of God to the salvation of thousands, before they were ever dreamt of. I hope, God is my witness, that I am heartily concerned for the interest of virtue, (if by that be meant the advancement of practical religion); but I never expected to see it promoted by the most philosophical speculations concerning its nature, or the finest harangues on its innate beauties, when the name and peculiar doctrines of Christ are thrown off, as unfashionable incumbrances of a discourse. Experienced christians, who have tasted the bread of life, will not contentedly be put off with such chaff: and if we imagine that the younger part of our auditors may be trained up to a relish for it, we may, perhaps, succeed in the attempt: but I much fear, that success will be the calamity of the church, and the destruction of souls\*.

(a) 1 Cor. iii. 11.

\* The author has taken a greater freedom on this head, as the discourse was delivered before several candi-



2. We may learn from hence, what are the most valuable proofs of parental affection.

Certainly there is no reason to esteem, as such, that fond indulgence which suffers ill habits to grow up in the young mind, and fears its present disturbance more than its future ruin : no, nor yet the more prudent care of providing plentiful and agreeable accommodations, for the subsistence and delight of your infant offspring, as they advance to maturity and settlement in life. These things indeed are not to be neglected ; but wretched are the children and I will add, the parents too, where this is the principal labour. Would you express a wise and religious tenderness, for which your children shall have reason to thank you in their dying moments, and to meet you with joy in the interviews of the eternal world ? do your utmost that Christ be formed in their souls ; and let them plainly see, that you even travail in birth again, till this happy work be accomplished. But this leads me to add,

3. What need is there of the work of the divine spirit on the heart ; in order to the laying this great foundation ?

The language of the text ; which speaks of Christ formed in us, naturally leads our thoughts to some agent, by whom the work is done, and when you consider what kind of a work it is, I appeal to your own consciences, whether it is to be thought merely a human production ? Were it only a name, a ceremony, a speculation,

dates for the ministry, for whom he had some peculiar concern.

or a passion, it would not be worth a moment's dispute,, whether you or we should have the glory of it. But as it is nothing less than the transformation of a corrupt and degenerate creature into the holy image of the Son of God, it were impiety for either to arrogate it to ourselves.

Let us therefore, on the whole, learn our duty and our wisdom. Let the matter be brought to a serious and immediate review, and let us judge ourselves by the character described, as those that expect very shortly to be judged of the Lord.—If, on the examination, any of you have reason to conclude that you are strangers to it, remember that the invincible battery of the word of God demolishes all the towering hopes you may have raised on any other foundation. Let conscience then say, whether any amusement or any business in life, be so important as to be attended to even for one single day, in neglect of this great concern, on which all the happiness of an immortal soul is suspended. If nothing be indeed found of greater moment, apply yourselves seriously to this, and omit no proper and rational method of securing it. Consider the ways by which Christ uses to enter into a soul, and wait upon him in those ways. Reflect seriously on your present condition ; constantly attend the instructions of his word, and the other solemnities of his worship ; and choose to converse intimately with those, in whom you have reason to think he is already formed. But in all remember, that the success depends upon a divine co-operation, and therefore go frequent.

ly into the presence of God by prayer; go into it this day, or if possible this hour, and importunately intreat the regenerating and sanctifying influences of his spirit, which, when you earnestly desire them, the gospel gives you such ample encouragement to expect.—But if you have reason to hope, that you have already received them, learn to what the praise should be ascribed, and let it animate you to pray, that through farther communications from the throne of grace you may be made continually more and more like to your Redeemer, till you are prepared for that world, where you shall shine forth in his complete resemblance, and shall find it your complete and eternal felicity. AMEN.

## SERMON III.

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*A Dissuasive from keeping bad Company.*

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PROV. iv. 14, 15.

*Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men ; avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.*

**I**F we have any regard to the judgment of the wisest of men, illuminated and directed by the influences of the divine spirit, we must certainly own, that ill company is a very dangerous snare and that young persons should be frequently and earnestly cautioned against it. The excellent collection, or moral and religious precepts, contained in this book of Proverbs, was especially intended to give subtilty or prudence to the simple, and to the young man knowledge and discretion (a). And as the sacred author well knew, that he should plead the cause of wisdom and piety in vain, while the voice of

(a) Prov. i. 4.

dissolute companions, was heard, and their conversation pursued, he begins his addresses to youth with repeated cautions on this head : My son, says he, if sinners entice thee consent thou not (a). As he proceeds in his discourse, the address grows more lively and earnest : and I am sure every attentive hearer will soon discover a peculiar energy in the words of the text. This faithful and compassionate counsellor doth not content himself with dissuading his young reader from joining with notorious offenders in their crimes, but even from going in the way with them, or with any other evil men ; nay, from entering upon it, or even approaching it, so much as to pass by it, if there were not a necessity of doing it. Enter not into the paths of sinners, and go not in the way of evil men : avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away. As if he should have said, “ shun the  
“ very place where such wretches assemble as  
“ you would if it were infected with the most  
“ malignant and dangerous disease : and if you  
“ have unwarily taken any steps towards it, stop  
“ short, and direct your course another way.”

Such lessons did Solomon teach ; and such had he himself learnt from David his father. That pious prince, in the very entrance on the book of Psalms describes the good man as one that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful (b) : and he elsewhere speaks of the citizen of Zion, as one in whose eyes a vile person, far from being chosen

(a) Prov. i. 10.

(b) Psal. i. 1.



as an intimate companion, is contemned, while he honours them that fear the Lord (a). Thus he delineates the holy and happy man; and he had a pleasing consciousness that this character was his own: he therefore appeals to God as a witness to it, that he had not himself sat with vain persons, and was determined that he would not go in with dissemblers, nay, that he was so far from seeking and delighting in their company, that he hated the congregation of evil doers and would not sit with the wicked (b); he resolutely drove them away from him, as one, who knew their society would be extremely injurious to the purpose he had formed of devoting himself to a religious course: depart from me ye evil-doers; for I will keep the commandments of my God (c).

The sacred writers of the New Testament recommend to us, that we should have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness (d); that we should not be unequally yoked in any kind of intimate friendship with unbelievers (e); and that if any do not obey the word, we should note such a one, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed (f).

Considering such passages of scripture, as well as the reason of the thing, I think it proper at this time to pursue this subject at large. I well know, that I may succeed in this particular address, and yet leave you strangers to a saving change, and far from the kingdom of God; but if I cannot prevail with you to refrain from

(a) Psal. xv. 4. (b) Psal. xxvi, 4. 5. (c) Psal. cxix. 115.

(d) Eph. v. 11. (e) 2 Cor. vi. 14. (f) 2 Thes. iii. 14.

and discard the company of sinners, I fear other admonitions will turn to very little account. In the further prosecution of the subject I will,

I. Briefly tell you, what I intend by that bad company which I would caution you against, and how far I would urge you to avoid it.

II. Offer some considerations to deter you from it: and then,

III. Conclude with a few obvious inferences.

I. I am briefly to shew you, what I would now caution you against.

And here surely, I need not be large in telling you what I mean by bad company. It is, in general, "the conversation of those, who are "apparently destitute of the fear of God;" "and so it takes in, not only persons of the most dissolute and abandoned characters, but those vain and worthless creatures who manifest a neglect of religion, though free from gross and scandalous immoralities. So that what I have to say will be applicable to all sinful companions whatever; but the more notorious their vices are, the more evident will be the force of each of those arguments, by which I shall now endeavour to fortify you against their society.

Neither shall I use many words in telling you how far you are to avoid such company; for to be sure you cannot imagine that I am endeavouring to dissuade you from a necessary commerce with them in the common affairs of life, and the business of your calling; since then as the apostle expresses it, you must needs

go out of the world (a), considering the state of religion and morality in it. Nor would I lead you to a neglect of any offices of humanity and civility to them ; for such a behaviour, instead of adorning the gospel, would greatly prejudice their minds against it. Least of all, would I hinder you from applying yourselves to them by serious admonitions, in order to convince them of their sin and danger, and to engage them to repentance and reformation. In these views the blessed Jesus himself conversed freely with persons of the most infamous characters, though he were perfectly holy, harmless, undefiled, and in that sense separate from sinners (b). The folly I would caution you against is, “ chusing irreligious persons for your intimate friends, “ and delighting to spend your vacant hours in “ vain conversation with them.” My design, does not require farther explication ; the great difficulty I apprehend is, what I shall meet with while I am attempting,

II. To fortify you against the danger of such companions, and to engage you cautiously to avoid them.

When I call this the most difficult part of my work, it is not because I am at a loss for arguments, or apprehend those arguments to be either weak or obscure. A variety of considerations immediately present themselves to my mind, so plain, and yet so important, that I am confident were the matter to be weighed in an equal balance, a few moments would be sufficient to produce a rational conviction of what

(a) 1 Cor. v. 10.

(b) Heb. vii. 26.

I am to prove. But oh, who can answer for the effect of such a conviction? When I consider the unaccountable enchantments which there seems to be in such company as I am warning you against; and reflect on the instances, in which I have seen young persons of sense and education, who once appeared to promise remarkably well, at length entangled, and some of them ruined by it; I dare not presume on the success I might otherwise expect. Nevertheless, I know, that the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword; and I know, that if it be guided by the hand of the blessed Spirit, it will be effectual to divide you from your most delightful carnal associates; since it can separate things as near to each other, as the joints and the marrow, and can lay open the heart to so clear a view, as that it shall seem to have discerned even its thoughts and intentions (a).

It is this encourages me to make the attempt, and I hope the difficulty and importance of the case will not only excuse my handling it at large, but will also engage all, who have any regard to the happiness of the rising generation, to lift up their hearts to God, that he may assist and succeed me in pleading this weighty cause, in which the interests of time and eternity are so apparently concerned.

Give me leave then to bespeak the most serious attention of all that hear me, and especially of the younger part of my audience, while I urge on your consciences such considerations as

(a) Heb. iv. 12.

these—Seriously reflect on the many unhappy consequences which will attend your going in the way of sinners ;—Think on those entertainments and pleasures which you give up for the sake of their society ; and consider how little advantage you can expect from thence, to counter balance the pleasures you resign, and the evils you incur by it.

1. Let me intreat you seriously to reflect on the many unhappy consequences which will attend your entering into the path of the wicked, and going in the way of evil men.

You probably will by this means quickly wear out all serious impressions ;—you will be exposed to numberless temptations to sin and folly,—and thrown out of the way of amendment and reformation ;—and thus will be led into a great many temporal inconveniences,—till at last you perish with your sinful companions, and have your eternal portion amongst them in hell.

- (i) By this means you will be in the ready way to lose all sense of religion, and outgrow the impressions of a serious education if providence have favoured you with it.

If your hearts are not harder than the nether mill stone, some such impressions were surely made in your younger years ; and I believe, few that have been trained up in religious families have entirely escaped them. If these are duly improved, they will end in conversion and glory ; but, if they are resisted, they lead to greater obstinacy in sin, and throw the soul still



farther from the kingdom of God. Now what can be more evident than the tendency of vain and carnal conversation to quench the blessed Spirit of God, and hinder the mind from falling in with his preparatory work upon it.

I am persuaded, that if they, who are under some prevailing sense of divine things, consider how difficult they often find it to preserve those impressions on their spirits, in the company of some who appear on the whole to be serious people, even they will be afraid frequently to venture into the company of the sensual and profane. As Mr Bolton finely expresses it\*,  
“ throw a blazing firebrand into snow or rain,  
“ and its brightness and heat will quickly be extinguished; so let the liveliest christian plunge  
“ himself into carnal company, and he will soon  
“ find the warmth of his zeal abated and the  
“ tenderness of his conscience prejudiced.”  
Now, if it be so detrimental to those that have deliberately devoted themselves to the service of God, and have had some experience of the goodness of his ways, judge how much more dangerous it must be to him who has only some feeble desires, and, as yet undetermined purposes, in favour of it. Young people are extremely rash and credulous; and when you see your favourite companions neglecting serious godliness, and, perhaps, deriding it, it is a thousand to one, that you will not have the courage to oppose them: you will probably, at first be silent; and then, you will grow ashamed of your former tenderness; till at last, seduced by

\* Directions for walking with God, page 10.

the craftiness of them that lie in wait to deceive (a) you may secretly censure religion, as an unnecessary and burthensome thing, if you are not transported so far as openly to revile it, and join in the senseless and impious cry against those that appear to be influenced by it.

Again, when you have been used to the pleasures of such company, and perhaps, of that unbridled luxury which they may be ready to lead you into, you will, no doubt, lose your relish for all the entertainments of devotion. The hours you spend in the exercises of it in public, or in the family, will grow tedious, and almost insupportable to you; and you will rejoice when the dull work is over, that you may return to your beloved companions again. Thus will all regard to religion be gradually worn out of your mind; and this seems to be the argument suggested by St Paul, to dissuade the Corinthians from being unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? or what communion hath light with darkness (b)? This alone would be a very considerable evil; but it is far from being all you have to fear; for, I add,

- (2) By frequenting ill company, you lay yourselves open to many temptations, and probably will be drawn into a great deal of guilt.

You know there is a strong force in example, "We are all," says Mr Locke, "a kind of Camelions, that take a tincture from that

(a) Ephes. iv. 14.

(b) 2 Cor: vi. 14.

“which is near us \*.” So that, if you converse with wicked people, you will probably become like them yourselves. It is an argument which Solomon urges against forming any peculiar intimacy with those that are passionate; and it is equally applicable to many other cases: make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go; lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul (*a*).

Alas, sinners, you are too apt to be led into guilt by your own corrupt hearts, even when you have the fairest advantages against it, amidst the wisest instructions, and the holiest examples; how forcibly then will the temptation assault you, when you see others, and those your most intimate friends, yield to it without any appearance of remorse? and when, it may be, you hear them pleading in favour of the compliance, and endeavouring to persuade you to join in the practice, as what they have themselves found delightful and advantageous?

It is no small evil for an immortal creature, who was sent into the world to serve God, and to secure a happy immortality, to live in vain, and trifle away hour after hour, in mere idleness and impertinence. Yet this is the least sin that bad company leads a man into. Unhappy as this is, would to God that it always rested here! the world would at least be more peaceful, and your damnation, sinners, would be less intolerable. But daily observation undeniably proves, that by evil examples, and wicked companions, people generally learn

\* Locke's Works, vol. iii. page 23. (*a*) Prov. xxii. 24, 25.

gluttony and drunkenness, swearing and uncleanness. It engages them in foolish quarrels, in which they blaspheme the name of God, and injure their neighbour; and it habituates them to such extravagant ways of living, as they are forced to support by secret dishonesty, and very often by open robbery. Thus they gradually fall into those scandalous enormities, which at first they could not have thought of without horror. This fatal effect is plainly hinted at in Proverbs, where the wretch that abandoned himself to the society of sinners, is represented as acknowledging, that he was almost in all evil, in the midst of the congregation and assembly (*a*); i. e. he was so hardened in his various crimes, as not to be ashamed to commit, or at least to avow them in the most public manner.

(3) By frequenting sinful company, you will throw yourselves out of the way of repentance and reformation.

I before observed, that you will by this means contract a disrelish for the exercises of devotion; and this will probably be attended with the neglect of those ordinances, which God hath appointed as the great means of our conversion and edification. And when these are neglected, how can you expect that God should pursue you with uncommon interpositions of his grace? That when his word is despised, and his house forsaken, he should seize you as it were by violence, amongst your dissolute companions, and convert you in your midnight revels? Your

(*a*). Prov. v. 14.

pious friends may indeed have some opportunities in private of expostulating with you; but it will require a great deal of resolution to attempt it; and when they do, they must take it as a peculiar favour, if you give them a patient hearing, and don't affront and revile them for their charitable endeavour of delivering your souls from the pit of destruction, and plucking you as brands out of everlasting burnings (a).

But if we should allow, that their importunity, or any other consideration, should sometimes bring you within the hearing of an awakening, practical sermon, and some serious impression should be made upon your minds by it, it is very probable all these convictions will wear off, as soon as you return to your wicked companions again. One gay licentious hour amongst them may undo the labour of many days and weeks, and presently teach you to laugh at yourselves for the former alarm, as if every fear had been vain, and every purpose of reformation needless. And thus your hearts, will be like tempered steel, which gathers strength from every blow of the hammer, to make a more vigorous resistance to the next; and you will harden to all the mollifying methods of providence and of grace, till at length you provoke the blessed spirit, so often resisted, entirely to withdraw, and so you be sealed up under final impenitency. Thus the poor foolish creature I mentioned before, who was so fond of the society of sinners, is represented as reflecting too late, that all the wisest and kindest endeavours

(a) Amos iv. 11.



of his friends, for his reformation, had been utterly ineffectual. How, says he, have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof! I have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined my ear to them that instructed me (a). This incorrigibly disobedient will you be, if you enter into the path of sinners, and go in the way of evil men. In consequence of this,

- (4) You will undoubtedly find yourselves exposed to a great deal of present inconvenience and calamity, with regard to your temporal affairs,

Now, methinks, this consideration should at least have its weight with you, whose guilt it is, and whose ruin it too probably may be, to look only at those things which are seen, and are temporal (b). I before observed, that by frequenting ill company, you will be under strong temptations to idleness. And thus you will in all probability, waste your substance, and shorten your days; and in the mean time lay a foundation for many diseases, which may give you an utter disrelish for all the comforts and entertainments of life, when you stand in the greatest need of relief from them. I add, that it is not at all unlikely, that the foolish quarrels, into which it may lead you, may be attended with cost or pain, and perhaps with both. And as for your reputation, which to a generous spirit is one of the dearest of all temporal enjoyments, I must plainly tell you, that if you determine to take no care in the choice of your company, you must necessarily give it up. For if, almost

(a) Prov. v. 12, 13.

(b) 2 Cor. iv. 18.

by a miracle, you should be kept from running with your sinful associates, into the same excess of riot and folly; yet the very circumstance of taking pleasure in such sort of companions will be enough to overthrow it, in the judgment of wise and considerate people.

Such arguments as these does Solomon use, when cautioning his young readers against so dangerous an entanglement. He pleads the many temporal inconveniences and evils which attend it, and many of which I have just been mentioning. He observes, that it tends to impoverish them: he that follows after vain persons, shall have poverty enough (*a*): that however it may seem the cement of friendship, it often proves the occasion of enmity and contention (*b*); for who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babblings? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine with the partners of their midnight debaucheries: How much the health is impaired by it, is evidently suggested, when he represents the poor creature as mourning at last, when his flesh and his body are consumed (*c*); and to add no more, he expressly tells us, that sinners, by these kinds of confederacies, lay snares for their own blood, and lurk privily for their own lives (*d*); which he useth as an argument against complying with their proposals, when they seem most advantageous. And accordingly we see, that most of those unhappy

(*a*) Prov. xxviii. 19. (*b*) Chap. xxiii. 29, 30.

(*c*) Prov. v. 11, (*d*) Prov. i. 18.

creatures, who are the victims of public justice, and fall by the hand of the executioner, declare with their dying breath, that wicked company was the occasion of their ruin.

- (5) If you choose the society of sinners, you will probably perish with them, and have their company in hell, as you have had it upon earth.

The probability of this dreadful consequence is but too apparent from what I have said under the former heads of this discourse. If you loose those religious impressions which were early made, if you are drawn into a great deal of sin, and thrown out of the way of repentance and reformation, what can the end of these things be? Or what can you reasonably expect, but that God should execute upon you all the fierceness of his wrath? And to cut off your vain, presumptuous hopes, and awaken you to that sense of danger, which is so absolutely necessary for your deliverance, he has expressly threatened it; and that not only in general with respect to all sinners, but particularly to such as are fond of wicked company. And it is worth your while to observe, in what language he threatens it; a companion of fools shall be destroyed (a). So that what Solomon says of one sort of sinful companions is justly applicable to the rest. Their house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death (b).

Now let me intreat you to dwell upon this thought, till you feel something of the weight

(a) Prov. xiii. 20.

(b) Prov. vii. 27.

and the terror of it. Be sometimes asking yourselves, "How can we dwell with the devouring fire? How can we lie down in everlasting burnings (a)?" How can you endure those torments yourselves? And in what temper, and with what reflections, will you meet the partners of your guilt and folly there? And in what manner will you converse together? Alas, my friends, in those seats of horror and despair, all that rendered your intercourse on earth delightful, will be come to an eternal period. There will be no opportunities for you and them to gratify your sensual desires together; no delicious food, no intoxicating liquors, no gay tales, no chearful songs; but instead of these, blackness of darkness for evermore (b); weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth (c); the worm that never dies, and the fire that cannot be quenched (d).

Will it then be any relief to you, to look back on those days which you shared in luxury, and in sin? Will your friendship still continue? and will you be endeavouring by tender condolences, and by obliging offices to mollify and alleviate the miseries of each other? Alas, sinners, hell is not the seat of friendship, but of everlasting enmity and rage. All the wretched inhabitants will live in perpetual discord, and mutual abhorrence. And no doubt your keenest resentments will burn against those, who have been your partners in sin; as your aggravated damnation will be in part owing to them. And

(a) Isa. xxxiii. 14.

(b) Jude ver. 13.

(c) Mat. viii. 12.

(d) Mark ix. 44, 46, 48.



on the same principles will their indignations rise against you. And thus you will lie for ever, continually exercising all the enlarged capacities, of your minds, to increase the torments of each other. And perhaps it is the only instance, in which your desires and your attempts will be effectual. Oh ! sirs, when I think of the air and form of some wicked creatures when transported with passion, when I observe how venomous their speeches, and extravagantly furious all their actions are, methinks I see the most lively emblem of the society below ; but alas, how much more dreadful must it be, to stand exposed to the rage and revenge of a damned spirit ! yet this is like to be your lot : and if it be, the most delightful of your companions in sin, will probably prove your fiercest tormentors.

There is reason to apprehend, that these, and such as these, will be the miserable consequences of wicked company with regard to yourselves. And I might now infer from hence, that your frequenting it must be very grievous and injurious to others. I might plead against it at large, from the alarms and sorrows to which your parents and ministers will be exposed by your pursuing it, and the mischievous influence it may have on the circumstances and characters of your own domestics, if ever you appear as heads of families, as well as of many others, with whom you be concerned. Solomon urges one of these considerations, when he says, a companion of riotous men shameth his father



(a.) Here would be a large field of argument ; but I wave it at present, lest my discourse should swell beyond due bounds, as well as to avoid the repetition of what I was laying before you on a former occasion (b).

Nevertheless, I hope you are abundantly convinced, by what hath been already said, that the pernicious and dangerous consequences are many and great : let me intreat you farther to consider,

2. How much nobler entertainment and pleasure you give up for a converse, which is like to prove so fatal to you.

I would fain persuade you, if already entangled, to burst these bands asunder, and to cast away these cords from you, which will otherwise bind you as victims to eternal wrath. And to engage you to it, I would say, as the wise man doth, forsake the foolish, and live (c) : it is not only necessary, to preserve your life ; but you may likewise be assured, it would most happily improve it, and bring you to another kind of life than what you have yet known, in comparison of which your present way of life is but a wild, distempered dream. The father of lies may, perhaps has, persuaded your weak and unexperienced minds, that there is no such thing as pleasure to be found out of this enchanted circle which he has drawn about you : but did you know wherein true self-enjoyment consists, I might have declined all those awful arguments which I have so largely been urging upon your consciences. Oh ! my friends, could

(a) Prov. xxviii. 7. (b) See Serm. I. (c) Prov. ix, 6.

I but this day be so happy as to persuade you to break the chain, and to abandon these insnaring companions, not merely from prudential, but religious considerations, I should presently lead you into a new world. Instead of being the associates of the idle, the intemperate, and the profane, you would then converse with those who are indeed the excellent of the earth (a), and would be able to say with David, I am a companion of them that fear thee, O Lord, and of them that keep thy precepts (b). And is that a contemptible thought? What think you, if an angel were to descend from heaven to make his abode on earth, or the Lord Jesus Christ himself were to appear again in the infirmities of human flesh; with whom would that angel, or that Redeemer chuse an intimate friendship, and as frequent converse? Your own consciences tell you, that if he were ever found amongst you, it would only be as a physician visits an hospital, to cure others not to delight himself. And why should you esteem that society unworthy your regard, which, you are sure, the Lord Jesus Christ would prefer? It is because you imagine it gloomy and melancholy; but that imagination proceeds from ignorance and mistake. Were you to be with them, when they are discoursing together of the things of God, (as, through the divine goodness, many of us have been), you might frequently discern in their countenances such marks of sweet serenity and composure, and sometimes of elevated hope, and sublime, ange-

(a) Psal xvi. 3.

(b) Psal. cxix. 63.

lic joy, as would be an ocular demonstration of the pleasure which a serious and regular mind may find in such converse. And to this you might be admitted, if, by forbearing to enter into the ways of sinners, you discovered the marks of a teachable disposition. For, as Solomon declares the ear that heareth the reproof of life, i. e. that reproof which tends to preserve life, and to make it happy, abideth among the wise (*a*); and, as he chuseth their company, he will readily be admitted to it.

I might add, that, on this supposition you would also know what it is to be good company to yourselves. Reflection, which is now your torment, would become your pleasure. The review of a well ordered mind, of a prudent and religious conduct, would delight you more, than the most agreeable prospects, or harmonious music; and instead of holding your happiness, as you now do, in a servile dependance on the presence, nay, I may add, on the humour, of others, even of such as are least to be depended upon, you would have it treasured up in your own breast, and, like the good man described in scripture, would be satisfied from yourselves (*b*).

Nay, which is still infinitely more, you might humbly hope, through the righteousness and grace of the Redeemer, that the blessed God, the eternal and inexhaustible source of happiness, would lift up the light of his countenance upon you, and bid you welcome into his gracious presence. This is an argument which St Paul

(*a*) Prov. xv. 31.

(*b*) Prov. xiv. 4.

urges, in the view in which I now mention it, when, dissuading the Corinthians from forming any intimate alliance with sinners, he pleads, that God hath said, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty (*a*). And God forbid, that you should ever arrive at such a degree of impious madness, as to question whether the favour and friendship of the majesty of heaven be preferable to the converse of a vain, sinful worm. Oh, that he would grant you the visit of one hour, of one moment; and you would need nothing father to teach you to say, whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire but thee (*b*); none that I desire, in comparison with thee; how much less in opposition to thee!

Once more, if you are companions of the saints now, you may enjoy the reviving hope, that you will shortly meet with them in the presence of God above, and for ever converse together with the greatest ardour of mutual affection, as well as the noblest improvement, both in capacity, temper, and circumstances. Nor will you there only meet your pious friends, with whom on earth you took sweet counsel together, and perhaps went to the house of God in company (*c*); but you will form many new acquaintances with the most excellent and glorious of created beings; you

(*a*) 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18. (*b*) Psal. lxxiii. 25. (*c*) Psal. lv. 14.

will come to the innumerable company of angels, and to the spirits of just men made perfect; nay, you will dwell for ever with God the judge of all, and Jesus the mediator of the new covenant (*a*). But surely you cannot expect a favourable reception into that blessed world, or any of the preparatory felicities I have been describing, if you resolutely adhere to foolish and wicked companions now. David would not have presumed to pray, as he doth, Gather not my soul with sinners, as if he could not have said, as in the preceding words, I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers; I have hated the congregation of evil-doers, and will not sit with the wicked (*b*). And if you think to reconcile such companions, with such enjoyments and hopes, you delude yourselves with inconsistent dreams, in direct opposition to the voice of reason, as well as of scripture. Give me leave, once more to intreat you to consider,

3. How little advantage you can receive from such society, to counter-balance the damage you sustain, and the happiness you forfeit for it.

I am sure it ought to be something very grand and important, for which you grieve your friends, and provoke God; for which you cut yourselves off from the most valuable enjoyments in this world and a better, and at length plunge yourselves into everlasting destruction. And now shew us, I entreat you, the worthy prize; tell us what those friends are, whose

(*a*) Heb. xii. 22, 23, 24.

(*b*) Psal. xxvi. 4, 5, 6.



company you purchase at so dear a rate; and what important offices they can do for you, to make you amends for all you must lose, and for all you must suffer on their account? Poor wretches! the most they can do, is to administer something which may gratify your appetite, or amuse your imagination, for a few transient moments. A relishing meal, a chearful cup, a thoughtless, noisy burst of laughter, are some of the best things they can procure for you! And are these so great? Surely, if it were reasonable in any case, it is peculiarly so in this, to say of laughter, it is mad; and of mirth and luxury, what doth it (a)? It is but a poor entertainment while it lasts, which Solomon elegantly compares to the useless momentary blaze of a few crackling thorns under a pot (b); and there is a mixture of uneasiness often attending it from a view to the consequences, which will often force itself on the mind; so that even in laughter, the heart is sorrowful (c). But if the satisfaction it gave were ever so transporting, or ever so complete, yet still it would be very contemptible, because its duration is so short. Death is continually advancing towards you, which will very shortly separate you from your chosen companions; and if the most beloved of them were waiting round your bed, they could by no means deliver you from the grave, or moderate the agonies, which were bringing you thither. Even before your trembling souls are dislodged from your bodies, your relish for their converse will be entirely spoiled; so that you

(a) Eccles. ii, 2. (b) Eccles. vii, 6. (c) Prov. xiv, 13.

would thing yourselves barbarously insulted by them, if, in the midst of your anguish and distress, they should offer you those entertainments which you once so fondly pursued together, and which were the cement of your precarious and short-lived friendship. Judge then, whether those things are so highly valuable, which, in the near views of eternity, you would behold with horror, rather than with pleasure; and whether your most rational felicity in both worlds is to be sacrificed to such vanities as these.

I firmly believe, that, upon such reflections as these, you must be compelled, even to your own condemnation, to confess, that, as Solomon declares, He that followeth vain persons is void of understanding (*a*). And if you are convinced of it, then let me intreat you, my dear unhappy friends who are entangled in this fatal snare, that, in the strength of divine grace, you would immediately attempt an escape. It will indeed require resolution; but, remember it will amply reward it: and therefore determine upon it this day, that you will go no more to their assemblies of vanity, and of sin; and when they would entice you, consent not to them (*b*); but rather tell them plainly and seriously, that you know and consider, that your souls are at stake: and tell them, you avoid their company now, because you dread it in hell. And who knows, but such a serious and lively admonition from those who were once their brethren in iniquity, may do more to a-

(*a*) Prov. xii, 11.

(*b*) Prov. i. 10.

waken them, than many addresses from the pulpit? Who knows, but it may effectually reclaim them, and be a means of forming them to such characters, as may make their friendship as safe and as honourable, as ever it was dangerous and infamous? At least, you will have delivered your own soul, and may comfortably hope that your life will be given you for a prey. With this solemn charge, as in the name and presence of God, I dismiss you from this head, and proceed.

III. To those reflections and inferences, with which I shall conclude the discourse.

1. If so many evils and dangers attend the pursuit of wicked company, how careful should parents and governors be, to keep young people out of the way of it!

You see, from all I have been saying, how necessary this care is, if you desire they should be happy in this world, or the next. It is a dreadful charge that is brought against Eli, and a dreadful doom is pronounced upon him for it; that his sons made themselves vile; and that he restrained them not (*a*). And therefore, as you love your own souls, and those of yours, endeavour, with all possible resolution, to avoid being culpable yourselves on this account.

And here I would observe, that your care must begin very early, and that it must take a great compass. You should endeavour betimes to lay in an antidote against the future poison, by labouring to the utmost to possess their in-

fant minds with a sense of the divine presence, a desire of pleasing God, and a dread of offending him. You should endeavour to inspire them with an abhorrence of sin, and a love to the ways and people of God. Endeavour to find out suitable company for them, and to make your own company as delightful to them as you can. Indulge them in such diversions, as duty and prudence will admit: for too rigorous a restraint from these things makes them eager to pursue them wherever they are to be found. And if you see they begin to form an acquaintance with such as you think likely to insnare and corrupt them, first gently warn them of it, and endeavour by the easiest methods to draw them off: if those will not do, reason with them more largely on the head; lay before them the various dangers they will be exposed to, and shew them the instances of those who have been injured and ruined by such company: instances, which it is to be feared, you will always have near at hand: and if all this be not enough, interpose with the authority God has given you: absolutely forbid them the place and company, and let them see by your after conduct, that you are in good earnest in the prohibition. At the same time, endeavour to recommend religion to them in the most amiable light, that they may be convinced it carries its entertainment along with it, so that there is no need of seeking pleasure in the paths of the destroyer. I know this is a matter of difficulty and requires a great deal of prudence and steadiness to conduct it aright; but I am

persuaded, if parents and masters were careful in this respect, few would be ruined till they came to be at their own disposal, and the destruction of multitudes would be entirely prevented. May God graciously give you wisdom to know your duty, and faithfulness to perform it!

2. If wicked company be so pernicious, as we have heard; then how cautious should we be in the choice of a companion for life, if you are in such circumstances, as to have that choice before you.

It is evident, that as all bad company is dangerous, so the nearer it is to us, and the more frequent the opportunities of conversing with it, the greater mischief will it probably do us. Those who are in the conjugal relation, should make it their great business and care, to assist and animate each other in the ways of God; and such is the prevalency of our sinful nature, and so many the snares and temptations of life, that, with all possible advantages our progress will be too slow, and too frequently interrupted. What then could you expect, if you had those, not only in your houses, but in your arms too, from whom you would hardly ever hear a serious word; and who would perhaps be unwilling to give you the hearing, if you should attempt any such discourse: nay, might possibly revile or banter you for it, and, by their impious language and wicked example, might greatly deaden religious sentiments in your own heart, and either prevent or frustrate your endeavours for communicating them to those un-



der your care? When christians of one sex or the other, choose such a companion for life, they seem to lie under great difficulties, and will be in imminent danger, either, on the one hand, of failing in a due affection and regard, or on the other, of being perverted and ensnared by that very affection, which both the duties of the relation, and the comfort of life so evidently require. If any of you have taken this hazardous step, I have nothing to do but to advise you, to be daily looking up to God for that extraordinary prudence which your circumstances require. But this is such a situation, that I cannot forbear praying, that, as for those of you who are yet single, no considerations of beauty, wit, temper, or fortune, may ever prevail upon you to bow your necks to so unequal a yoke.

3. How much reason have you to be thankful, if God has delivered you from the snares of wicked company, and given you a relish for such as is good.

Think how easily you might have been entangled and undone. Think how many, in other respects, at least your equals in wisdom and capacity, are in this instance making a foolish choice; and bless the Lord, who has given you counsel (a). It is his mercy, that gives you serious and useful friends, and gives you a heart to value them. By their converse you may gain many advantages directly opposite to the evils I have been describing. Be humbled, that you have improved these advantages no bet-

(a) Psal. xvi. 7.

ter; and pray for the aids of divine grace, that for the future they may be more diligently regarded. And if providence ever lead you into the company of carnal sinners, which the most pious and resolute cannot wholly avoid, labour that they may be something the better for you, and you not the worse for them; and consider all the irregularities you observe in them, as farther motives of thankfulness to God, for making a difference betwixt them and you, and giving you company so much more amiable than theirs. Once more,

4. Let young persons of a regular character take great heed, that they do not, by insensible degrees, become dangerous companions to each other.

That social turn of mind which is natural to men, and especially to young persons, may perhaps lead you to form yourselves into little societies, particularly at this season of the year, to spend your evenings together. But let me intreat you to be cautious how you spend them. If your games and your cups take up your hours, till you entrench on the night, and, perhaps, the morning too, you will, to be sure, quickly corrupt each other, and soon degenerate into a club of rakes and debauchees. Farewell then to prayer, and every other religious exercise in secret. Farewell to all my pleasing hopes of you, and to those hopes which your pious parents have entertained. You will then become examples and instances of all the evils I have so largely been describing. Plead not, that these things are lawful in themselves; so are most of

those, in a certain degree, which by their abuse prove the destruction of men's souls and bodies. If you meet, let it be for rational and christian conversation; and let prayer and other devotions have their frequent place amongst you. And if you say, or think, that a mixture of these will spoil the company, it is high time for you to stop your career, and call yourselves to an account; for it seems, by such a thought, that you are lovers of pleasure much more than lovers of God (*a*). Some of these things appear to have a tincture of severity: but consider, whether (in present circumstances\*) I could have proved myself faithful to you, and to him in whose name I speak, if I had omitted the caution I have now been giving you. I shall only add, that, had I loved you less tenderly, I had perhaps warned you more coldly of this dangerous and deadly snare. May God render the admonition as successful, as I am sure it is seasonable and necessary!

(*a*) 2 Tim. iii. 4.

\* N. B. The substance of this sermon was first preached at Harborough, December 25, 1725: and afterwards at Northampton, on that day eight years.

## SERMON IV.

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*Religious youth invited to early communion.*

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ISAIAH xliv. 3—5.

*For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring; and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses: one shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel.*

**O**N the first hearing of these words, you will easily apprehend, that they afford abundance of very proper matter for a discourse to young people; but you may perhaps be surprised when I tell you, that I shall take occasion from them to address religious youth, with a large invitation to an early attendance on the table of the Lord.

This is a surprise which I do not at all affect to give: for to press in a scripture to serve a purpose foreign to its original design, and to turn a mere allusion into an argument, is, in its degree, to handle the word of God deceitfully (*a*), and is indeed an injury to it, rather than an honour. So that I much fear, that by thus attempting to make every thing of the scripture, we shall at length come to make nothing of it: for those seemingly distant extremes approach nearer to each other than some seem to be aware.

But I hope, my friends, you have learnt to judge of the pertinency of scripture to any purpose in hand, not merely by the first sound of the words, but by an attentive view of its sense and connexion; and when the words I have been reading are diligently examined, they may appear more suitable to my design than you at first apprehended.

Though God had before been reproofing Israel with great severity, and setting their sins in order before them (*b*), he intimates purposes of grace and mercy, which he yet entertained toward them, unworthy as they were (*c*). And, in order to prepare them for farther favours, he promises in the words of the text, to pour out upon them an abundant effusion of the blessed spirit. Now we well know, by a multitude of scriptures which I must not particularly enumerate, that it was to be in the latter day, i. e. the gospel times that this

(*a*) 2 Cor. iv, 2.

(*b*) Psal, l, 21.

(*c*) Isa. xliii, 22,—28.



glorious promise was most eminently to be fulfilled (*d*).

The blessed effects, which were to attend its accomplishment, are described in great variety and elegance of language. They are represented by the refreshment which water gives to him that is thirsty, and which plentiful floods of it afford to the dry ground, when scorched with the summer's heat. Accordingly it is said, that they, and their offspring too, should flourish in religion, like the grass when thus abundantly refreshed, or like willows by the water-courses, the verdure of which is so delightful, and the growth so speedy, that no more proper emblem could have been chosen. Thus should the souls of the children flourish; through the divine blessing, on the instructions of pious parents, and other methods appointed by God for their religious improvement. And in the next words the prophet uses still greater plainness of speech, to let us know that their number should be considerable, and their resolutions for God firm and determinate. One and another, this man and that, should come and own his relation to God, should publicly enter himself into the engagements of his covenant, and put in an humble claim to the important blessing it was intended to convey. One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob: and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel.

— (*d*) Compare Ezek. xxxvi. 25. 26. Zech. xii. 10.  
Joel ii, 28. Acts ii, 17. John vii, 38. 39,

Some very celebrated translators and critics understand the words, which we render, "Subscribe with his hand unto the Lord," in a sense a little different from that which our English version has given them. They would rather render them, "Another shall write upon his hand, I am the Lord's:" and they suppose it refers to a custom which formerly prevailed in the East, of stamping the name of the general on the soldier (*a*), or that of the master on the slave (*b*). As this name was sometimes borne on the forehead, so at other times on the hand; and it is certain that several scriptures, which may easily be recollected, are to be explained as alluding to this (*c*). Now from hence

(*a*) Sicut Milites Imperatoris Nomen in Manu scriptum habebant. *Grot*, Manui suæ inscribent Sacramentum Jehovahæ, sicut Milites, &c. *Bren*; Vid, *Ætius*, lib. viii. cap. 12, *Sigon*, lib. i. cap. 8. lib. ii. cap. 5. and *Augustin*, Epist. xx.

(*b*) Servi etiam olim Stigma Manui inustum ferebant, ex quo agnoscerentur. *Mercator*, See *Hammond*, on Rev. xiii. 15.

(*c*) Thus it is said, Rev. xiii. 16, 17. That all men,—bond and free received the mark of the beast in their right hand, or in their foreheads; and that without it none might buy or sell. And in another place, we read of an angel, that had the seal of the living God,—to seal his servants in their foreheads, (Rev. vii. 2, 3). In allusion to this also our Lord promises, Rev. iii. 12. I will write upon him that overcometh the name of my God, and my new name. On this account christians are said to be sealed by the spirit unto the day of redemption, (Eph. iv. 30,) as by his operations God owns them as his, and secures them to himself; and to this God seems to refer, in those condescending words, Isa. xlix. 16. I have graven Zion on the palms of my hands. See also Ezek. ix. 4. "To this custom some think St. Paul alludes, when he speaks of the marks of Christ, which he bare in his body, Gal. vi. 17." *Potter's Cr. Antiq.* vol. ii. page 7.

it seems to have grown into a custom amongst some idolatrous nations, when solemnly devoting themselves to the service of any deity, to be initiated into it by receiving some marks in their flesh, which might never wear out (a). This interpretation the original will certainly bear; and it here makes a very strong and beautiful sense, since every true christian has a sacred and an indelible character upon him. which shall never be erased. But if we retain our own version, it will come to nearly the same, and evidently refers to a practice which was sometimes used among the Jews (b), and which is indeed exceeding natural, of obliging themselves to the service of God, by setting their hand to some written articles emphatically expressing such a resolution. So that you see it must imply, that they who were, by the influences of divine grace, brought to a serious sense of religion, should, in a public and solemn manner, express their subjection to God, and their readiness to enter into covenant with him; and whatever rites should by him be appointed as the tokens of such a resolution, the text must intimate a chearful compliance with them. For it would be most unreasonable to imagine that

(a) Quos Deo alicui consecrabant and initiabant, hos Stigmatibus inurebant, *Pitisc Lexic in inscrip.* And *Lucian de Dea Syr.* says, Certis Notis compunguntur omnes; alii quidem in vola Manus, alii in Cervice, &c. The manner of doing it is described by *Prudentius.* Hymn x, ver. 1075, &c. And many commentators suppose this rite to be referred to Lev. xix. 28. Ye shall not print any marks upon you. See *Pool's Synops.*, in loc and *Spencer de Leg. Hebr.* lib. ii. cap. 14.

(b) Neh. ix. 38. x. 29.

any, of such a character, and in such circumstances, would prefer any form invented by themselves, or dictated merely by human prudence, to the express ordinance and institution of God. Now, forasmuch as it is evident, that under the christian dispensation, the Lord's supper is appointed to such purposes, the text must imply an attendance upon it; and when we see young christians presenting themselves at this holy solemnity, and joining themselves to God and his church in it, we may properly say, they subscribe with their hand to the Lord, and surname themselves by the name of Israel; just as we may say, in the old testament phrase, that incense is offered, and a pure offering (*a*), when holy souls are pouring out their prayers and supplications before the throne of grace, though odours and victims no longer accompany their devotions.

I have surely said enough, and perhaps more than enough, to account for my choosing these words to introduce the discourse I have in view; in which I am to press those young persons, whose hearts God has touched by his sanctifying grace, to subscribe, as it were, with their hand, by entering themselves early into christian communion, and eating and drinking with our Lord at his table. In order to which I shall,

- I. Propose some plain and important arguments, to engage such to an early attendance on this sacred institution.
- II. Answer some objections, which are most

(*a*) Mal. i. 11.

frequently urged to excuse the neglect of it; and,

III. Conclude with hinting at some reflections and inferences, which seem naturally to present themselves.

May divine grace render this attempt the means of leading many young persons into a conviction of their duty and interest, and of adding into the church such as shall be saved (a)!

I. I am to offer some plain and important arguments to engage religious youth to an early attendance on the supper of the Lord.

And, before I enter on these, I must entreat you to remember, that it is to religious youth only, that I address the invitation. I well know my friends, that the sacred institution I am now recommending, is a most awful and solemn thing. I know it was intended, not only as the commemoration of a Redeemer's dying love, but as a seal of our covenant engagements to God through him; so that to attend upon it without a sincere desire of receiving Christ Jesus the Lord and devoting ourselves to him, is a profanation that renders us, in some degree, guilty of the body and blood of the Lord (b). I am very sensible that for any to approach it in so unworthy a manner, is not only in itself a sinful action, but may, in its consequences, prove a snare to their own souls, a stumbling to others, and a dishonour to the church. And therefore, far from encouraging such persons to come, I should think it a very necessary duty to labour to the utmost to dissuade them from it, and if provi-

(a) Acts ii. 47.

(b) 1 Cor. xi. 27.



dence gave me an opportunity to prevent their admittance.

But I have frequently found, and I believe it has been the experience of many of my brethren in the ministry, that young persons, not only of a very sober and regular conduct, but even those who have appeared most deeply impressed with the concerns of their souls, and experimentally acquainted, so far as we can judge, with regenerating grace, have in many instances shewn a strange coldness to this blessed institution; and we have known not a few who have grown old in the neglect of it. I apprehend therefore, that a regard to the authority and glory of my great master, to the comfort and improvement of your souls, and to the edification and joy of the church in general, concur to require, that I offer you my younger friends some public admonitions on this head; to which I now desire your very serious attention.

And here permit me more largely to plead the weight of a dying Redeemer's command, as well as the honour, the pleasure, and the various advantages of an early compliance with it.

I. The ordinance to which I now invite you, is the known command and institution of a dying Redeemer.

I need not enlarge on the proof of what is so apparent. You undoubtedly know, that Matthew and Mark, and Luke, agree in giving us the history of its institution (*a*). And St Paul afterwards received it by express revelation

(*a*) Matth. xxvi. 26—28. Mark xiv. 22—24.

Luke xxii. 19, 20.

from Christ (a), and accordingly relates it in a very circumstantial and pathetic manner; telling us, not only that Christ commanded that this should be done in remembrance of him, but also that, by an attendance upon it, our Lord's death is shewed forth till he come; plainly intimating thereby, (what the ends of the ordinance do farther evince), that it was to continue in the church to its remotest ages. So that on the whole, you exceedingly mistake, if you imagine this to be mere matter of choice, in any other sense, than as all the duty of a rational creature is so. Our Lord has plainly determined the matter by his own sacred authority, leaving this ordinance in charge to all his followers. I say to all, for there is no limitation as to the age of those that should attend it. It is a command to young and old, as well as to rich and poor; and all, that are capable of understanding it, are obliged to comply with it, and thereby to do their homage to their exalted sovereign, and express their gratitude to their most generous friend. And can you in reason refuse your compliance? Methinks the name of the Son of God should carry along with it an authority too great to be despised, and the name of your Redeemer a constraining love too forcible to be withstood; especially the name of a dying Redeemer. Surely my friends, if a dying parent or brother, had given you a charge almost with his expiring breath, you could not lightly have acted contrary to it. How much greater regard do you owe to what the blessed

(a) 1 Cor. xi. 23, & seq.

Jesus appointed (as the apostle most pertinently observes) the same night in which he was betrayed (*a*)! Had it been some hard thing that he had then enjoined, and had the reason of it been unknown, so that it had appeared as a mere arbitrary constitution, the neglect of it had been foolish and ungrateful. Had it been a more painful rite than that of initiation amongst the Jews, more laborious than their frequent journeys to Jerusalem, and more costly than the sacrifices they offered there, the precept of our dying Lord had carried in it an abundant answer to all that ease or interest could have pleaded against it; how much more, when the reason is so evident, and the observation, in all respects, so easy! Judge, I pray you, whether it would be neglected. Judge, whether it be a decent thing, that when we are sitting down to break and eat bread, and to pour forth and drink wine, that we may represent the breaking of Christ's body, and the pouring forth of his blood, and seal our covenant-engagements with him, more than one half of the professing christians in the assembly should rise, and either leave the place, or withdraw to a distance from the holy table. What is this but to say, "We will now have nothing to do with the memorials of a crucified Saviour?" Will you, my friends, thus separate yourselves from us? What if others were to learn of you, and to imitate your example? Where would the ordinance quickly be? Nay, where would it already have been, had this temper prevailed? Where, but in our bibles?

(*a*) 1 Cor. xi. 23.

For there it would still have stood, to condemn our ungrateful disobedience, as it condemns yours.

2. An early attendance upon this ordinance will be truly honourable to you.

I wish I could say that the omission of it were, in the repute of the generality of professing christians, so dishonourable as it ought; but it is now grown so common, that much of the just infamy of it is worn off. Nevertheless, if we will seriously consider it, we must own, that where reason and duty require any practice, (which I have already proved to be the case here), the more frequently it is neglected, the more honourable is a regard to it; as it argues a laudable fortitude of mind, to oppose a prevailing evil, by which multitudes are borne away. And who, that hath any sense of generosity and goodness, would not wish to signalize himself on such an occasion as this?

I appeal to your own hearts, my brethren, even when you have divested yourselves of every sentiment of ostentation and pride, (which I would not desire to press into the service of the sanctuary,) would it not afford you a rational and pious pleasure to reflect, that your fellow-christians might say, with regard to you. "These are persons who are happily distinguished from most of their companions, by obedience to God and gratitude to their Redeemer; they dare stand up for the honour of his institutions, and of his name, in the midst of all the langour, and all the impiety of a degenerate age. Far from running with others

“ to the same excess of riot (*a*), they do not only secretly retire, that they may converse with God, and devote themselves to him, but they have the courage openly to appear in so good a cause. Far from being ashamed of Christ, or of his words, in this adulterous and sinful generation (*b*), they readily expose themselves to all the glorious reproach of a determinate adherence to him. Thus do they publicly declare, that their hearts are touched with a sense of his love, and inspired with resolution for his service. And as they are thus planted in the house of the Lord (*c*), we hope they will flourish to old age there; so that generations, which are yet unborn, shall be refreshed by their shade, and nourished by their fruit.” Thus will you, like Jabez (*d*), be more honourable than all your brethren, if, like him, you call upon the name of the Lord, or, in the language of the text, subscribe with your hand unto him.

3. Let me plead the pleasure which this ordinance affords, as a farther argument for an early attendance upon it.

If your hearts have been touched by regenerating grace, you must surely know, that communion with God through a mediator is unutterably delightful; and must own, that when you enjoy it, your souls are satisfied, as with marrow and fatness (*e*). If this be the case, I am sure you would look with an holy scorn on any sensual gratification that could be brought

(*a*) 1 Pet. iv. 4. (*b*) Mark viii. 38. (*c*) Psal. xcii. 13, 14.

(*d*) 1 Chron. iv. 9, 10.

(*e*) Psal. lxiii. 5.



into comparison with those sublime and sacred entertainments. Now, when you consider the Lord's supper as an ordinance of divine appointment, you have just reason to hope, that God will honour it with his gracious presence; nay, when you consider the nature and design of the institution, you may probably expect some peculiar sweetness and delight in it, beyond what you have hitherto known. I say not, that you can be absolutely secure of your finding it; for it becomes the sovereignty of the ever blessed God, not to confine himself invariably to any method of operation; lest his agency should at length be disregarded in it, and the honour transferred to the instrument: but I speak of what may probably be found; and I think I might here appeal to all considerate persons, who know any thing of the workings of the human mind; for I persuade myself they would be compelled to allow, that a regular attendance on such a solemnity has a direct tendency to produce the most delightful sensations in a soul deeply impressed with the great principles of our christian faith.

Oh, my friends, what a scene is there opened, when, by these lively memorials of his dying love, the Lord Jesus Christ is evidently set forth as crucified among us (a)! Surely the spectacle must be delightful, even to creatures who are themselves perfectly innocent and holy! Surely the angels, who probably are present in the churches while the solemnity is performed, must attend it with a pleasing mixture of admiration,

and of joy ! “ Thus,” may they be ready to say to each other, “ thus was the great design accomplished ! In such sufferings did the son of God expire ! By such surprising steps of condescension and of love, were apostate creatures recovered to their God ; thus was the flaming vengeance of the divine majesty atoned ! and now he is graciously smiling upon them ; and these happy souls are sitting, as round their father’s board, and anticipating the entertainments of our celestial world.”

But the guest, who is called to sit down at such a banquet, may well be supposed to feel some tender and transporting pleasure, beyond that of such an angelic spectator. “ These,” oh my soul, may the believer say, when the bread is broken, and the wine poured out, “ these were the painful sufferings, which the blessed Redeemer endured for such a wretch as I am ; for he loved me, and gave himself for me (a) ; he was wounded for my transgressions, he was bruised for mine iniquities (b). All these dreadful conflicts of nature did he pass through, to avert from me that weight of wrath, which would otherwise have overwhelmed me beyond all hope of deliverance. And here are the emblems of his dying love and his living care. Here are the precious seals of that everlasting covenant established in his blood which, as it is well ordered in all things and sure, is all my salvation, and all my desire (c). By these tokens doth a faithful God assure me, that my sins are par-

(a) Gal. ii. 20.

(b) Isa. liii. 5.

(c) 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

“ done, that I am admitted into his family,  
 “ and intitled to all the invaluable blessings of  
 “ his children. Delightful thought! I have no-  
 “ thing now to do, but quietly to sit down, and  
 “ wait with a holy sense and tranquillity of soul  
 “ for the intimations of my father’s will, till  
 “ he calls me to dwell in his house above. Yet  
 “ a little while, oh my soul, and thou shalt rise  
 “ to nobler enjoyments than even these; for the  
 “ bread thou hast now been eating, and the  
 “ wine thou hast been drinking, are pledges of  
 “ a divine banquet above, in the visible and  
 “ immediate presence of the blessed founder of  
 “ this sacred feast. The security of the covenant  
 “ I have this day been sealing, will continue in  
 “ full force when the bands of nature are dis-  
 “ solved: if I drink no more with my Saviour of  
 “ this fruit of the vine here, I shall drink it new  
 “ with him in his father’s kingdom (a); and  
 “ therefore may encounter death in the trium-  
 “ phant accents of good old Simeon (b), Now,  
 “ Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,  
 “ for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.”

Through the divine goodness, I hope we can  
 say, we speak what we know (c); and testify,  
 not only what we have heard from the experi-  
 ence of others, but what we have ourselves  
 tasted and felt. Thus is God visiting and re-  
 freshing our souls, while we are attending at  
 the blessed ordinance; and why will you not  
 come and share with us in the entertainments,  
 so sincerely and so freely offered? Is he not say-  
 ing unto you, Eat, oh my friends; and drink,

Mat. xxvi. 29. (b) Luke ii. 29, 30. (c) John iii. 11.

yea drink abundantly, oh my beloved (a)? Why then do you wrong your own souls, as well as affront his goodness, by neglecting the invitation? Would you come thus early, you might promise yourselves a peculiar welcome, and a peculiar pleasure. Many painful reflections might by this means, be prevented, and the evidence of your sincerity be more happily secured; not to say, that while your spirits are brisk and active, you may feel the impression of those sacred passions, which are so suited to this occasion, with greater energy, and greater tenderness than could be expected under the decays of nature, in the evening of life.

I shall only add, that these sublime pleasures are not limited to the happy moments which you spend in an immediate attendance on this feast of love; but they may be renewed, and perhaps sometimes increased, by reflection; whereas that often brings a sting along with it, more than sufficient to balance all the sweetness to be found in irregular, sensual delights.

4. An early attendance on the Lord's supper would be very useful, as well as entertaining.

It may probably be useful, both to yourselves and others. I say,

(1). It might be useful to yourselves in a variety of respects.

I consider, that I am now speaking to them that look upon improvement in religion as their highest interest; and therefore shall only endeavour to shew you, what a tendency this ordinance has to assist you in this; and that is so

evident, that I need not dwell largely on particulars, which, when suggested in a few words, may furnish you with matter of ample meditation. I shall but mention then the following hints.

The preparatory exercises of devotion might be very awakening and edifying to you. The review of your conduct, which you would be taking on the approach of these solemn seasons; the prayers and praises you would then be addressing to God, and the meditations in which your minds would be employed, would rouse you out of that lethargy into which you may be ready to sink, and which the best of men find too frequently prevailing.

The views of a bleeding Redeemer, of a reconciled God, of a confirmed covenant, and of a world of approaching glory, which this ordinance so naturally exhibits, would strengthen, as well as delight your souls; and, by virtue of the refreshments received at these solemnities, you might be enabled to go on your way rejoicing, and to make a sensible progress in your journey towards the heavenly Canaan.

The remembrance of those solemn engagements, with which you would then be binding your souls unto the Lord, would be a ready answer in hours of future temptation. You would start back with horror at the thought of alienating your services from a God, to whom you had so seriously and publicly devoted them; and of returning to those follies and sins, which you had in a peculiar manner covenanted against; for this would appear to be adding sacrilege



and perjury to the guilt of all your other offences.

I shall only add here, that, by entering thus early into the communion of a church, you will be brought under the more immediate inspection of the pastor of it, and likewise of your christian brethren, whose faithful and tender admonitions may be of great assistance to your unexperienced youth, and happily promote your progress, both in the paths of prudence and of holiness. Nay, the very thoughts of having drawn upon you the eyes of a society, and of others too, would engage you to some more than ordinary care, that you might not incur their censure, or disappoint the expectations which many have raised of you. And, in confirmation of all this, I cannot but observe, that many of the most eminent christians I have ever known, were found amongst those, who in their early days took this method of giving themselves to God and his people.—I might farther shew you.

(2) That your compliance with the exhortation I am now enforcing, might be useful to others, as well as to yourselves.

This is indeed, in part a consequence of the former; for, the more your own souls are advanced in knowledge and holiness, the more capable, and the more ready will you be, to promote the interest of Christ in the world, and to do good to those that are round about you. But I would especially lead you to consider, that your attendance itself, separate from these remoter consequences of it, might probably be useful to others.

Other young persons would, very probably, be awakened to a sense of their duty by your example ; and those who are more advanced in years may be shamed out of their neglect, when they see those, who are so far below them in age, getting the start of them here. Nor have instances been wanting within the circle of our own acquaintance, where parents have been stirred up to a holy emulation, by the early zeal of their own children in this respect. It will be a joy to all that wish well to the cause of a Redeemer, to see that God is giving him youth, like the drops of morning dew (*a*), and causing converts to flock to him; like doves unto their windows (*b*); but ministers will have a peculiar share in the pleasure, when they see of the travail of their soul (*c*), and find, that there are at least some instances, in which they do not labour in vain, and spend their strength for nought (*d*). Especially shall those of us, who are entering on the work of the Lord \* rejoice to meet our younger brethren at this ordinance, as it will give us encouragement to hope, that religion will not die in our hands, and be buried in the graves of our more aged friends ; but will be supported and adorned by you and transmitted to those that are yet unborn. The joy of our heart on this occasion may add vigour, as well as pleasure, to our labours; and so, through the concurrence of almighty grace, may have a tendency to render them still more successful.

(*a*) Psal. cx. 3.

(*b*) Isa. lx. 8.

(*c*) chap. liii. 11.

(*d*) chap. xlix. 4.

\* This Sermon was first preached several years ago, April 14, 1725.

Let me then entreat and conjure you, by the authority of the King of glory and of grace, and by a regard to the honour, the pleasure and the usefulness, of your lives, that you no longer persist in the neglect of an ordinance so sacred and noble, so delightful and advantageous.

I am persuaded, you must know and own, that the arguments I have urged are both evident and weighty; and yet I fear, you will find something to oppose to them, which if it be not examined, may prevent, or at least diminish their success. I proceed therefore,

II. To obviate some objections, which may be offered in excuse for a longer delay.

And here I shall not raise difficulties merely to canvass them, but confine myself to such objections as I have heard some urge on this occasion; and shall briefly suggest some hints, by way of answer to them. And if the enumeration be not so large, or the reply so full as you could wish, you know where you will be always welcome to propose your scruples as freely, and to state them as amply, as you please.

1. The most obvious reply to the preceding address is, that "you fear you are not prepared for this ordinance, and therefore apprehend, that your attendance would prove dangerous, rather than beneficial."

To this I answer; If the case be indeed thus, I have already told you, that you are not the persons to whom I have been addressing. Ne-

vertheless, give me leave to remind you, that you ought not rashly to form such a conclusion against yourselves. I am sure the matter requires a very attentive examination, and perhaps, on such a review, you may find things are not so bad as you imagine.

You say, you are not prepared: but I hope you know, that there is a great deal of difference between the nature and importance of an actual and habitual preparation. It is plain, that actual preparation consists in those extraordinary devotions, which, when opportunity permits, we should use in our approach to this sacrament; and therefore supposes such an approach to be determined; and consequently there can be no room in the present case, to object the want of that.

But you fear, that you are not habitually prepared i. e. that you are not persons of such a temper and character as Christ the great Lord of the feast, has invited, and will welcome to it. To determine that, consider the purposes for which the ordinance was appointed, and observe how far your present temper corresponds to them. It was appointed to commemorate the death of Christ, and, in this view, all are fit for it, who regard him as the great atoning sacrifice, and desire that their hearts may be affected, and their lives influenced by a sense of his dying love. It is a pledge of our mutual affection to each other, even to all our brethren in the Lord; and in this respect, all are prepared for it whose hearts are divested of all turbulent and unfriendly passions, and overflow with undissembled cha-

rich and diffusive benevolence. True, will you perhaps say; but is it not also designed as a seal of the covenant of grace? It certainly is; and it must be a very criminal profanation to attend it, while an alien from that covenant: your determination therefore must turn on the answer which conscience will make, as to your readiness to enter yourselves into it. For if this be your prevailing desire, and steadfast resolution, you have not only a right to the ordinance, though it be a seal of the covenant; but its being appointed by Christ, in this view, is an additional and very weighty argument for your immediate and frequent attendance upon it. And here the question is in short this; “do you  
“sincerely desire to make an unreserved surren-  
“der of yourselves to God, as your owner,  
“ruler, and supreme felicity, with a humble de-  
“pendence on the mediation of his son, and  
“the enlivening and sanctifying influences of  
“his spirit?” If this be your prevailing desire, and sincere purpose, you may assure yourselves of the kindest welcome, though your graces may be attended with a great deal of imperfection and weakness. But if you are strangers to such a desire, I must allow the objection in its full force, and own, that you have no business at the table of the Lord.

Nevertheless I cannot part with you so. Oh my friends is there nothing mournful, and I will add, is there nothing dreadful in such a conclusion as this? “I have no business at the  
“table of the Lord I have no part in this bles-  
“sed repast; because I have no part in that



“ Redeemer, whose death is commemorated  
“ there : and therefore I am shut out, by his  
“ own appointment shut out ! and is not that a  
“ sad intimation with respect to what is yet to  
“ come ? When I enter on the invisible and eter-  
“ nal state, as I this night may, will he admit  
“ me to live and reign with him in the world of  
“ glory, who would not allow me so much as  
“ an approach to his table on earth ? Oh my  
“ soul, it is too plain, thou must be separated  
“ from his blissful presence, and driven to an  
“ eternal distance, whence thou wilt behold  
“ with despairing eyes those pious souls who  
“ have eaten and drank with him here, sitting  
“ down with him in his kingdom.” This will  
not seem a light matter then : oh that it might  
now be duly regarded !

From all this it will appear that if this objection from an unprepared temper be true, it ought not to be lightly passed over, but should rather be seriously considered, and the removal of it, through divine assistance, immediately attempted ; since, till you are prepared for this sacrament, you cannot be prepared for heaven ; and consequently are in circumstances of the extremest danger, and daily walk on the precipice of eternal ruin.

But I would hope, many of you, on inquiry, find this is not your character and case. The unfitness you object will amount to no more than this ; that you find grace weak and languid in your souls, though you have reason to hope you are not wholly destitute of it. And is this a just excuse for absenting yourselves

from so confirming and edifying, as well as so delightful an ordinance? It is just as reasonable, as if you were to plead, "I am very faint, and therefore I will not take the most noble, reviving cordial. I am very weak and therefore I will refuse the most nourishing and strengthening food." Thus much for the first objection. It is more than time that I proceed to those that remain.

2. Others fear, that "the society of christians to which they would join themselves, may be unwilling to admit them into such a relation."

Now I must own, that if this objection be made by persons who have been notorious on account of their immoralities, and who are but lately recovered to a sense of divine things, it will not admit of an immediate answer; nor can I invite such to this sacred ordinance, till they give evidence of the reality of a change in their heart, by an apparent reformation of life, and some steady and prevalent resolution in a religious course: in the mean time, a regard to the honour of a christian society may oblige the church to be a little reserved towards such persons, and such a reserve is consistent with the greatest tenderness towards them, and the most affectionate concern, that they may not break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax (*a.*)

But as for such young persons, or others, who have been preserved from such irregularities, whose conduct has been fair and honoura-

ble, and who have not only arrived at a competent knowledge of the great truths of christianity, but have for some time been impressed with them, so that they have formed a determinate resolution for the service of God, and it may be, for some years made trial of his ways; far be it from us, my brethren, to say one word to discourage your approach. On the contrary, we would rather invite it; for we know it is most evidently reasonable, that when the spirit appears to say, Come (a), the bride, i. e. the church, should echo back the call. We know, my friends, that we are not the masters of this holy feast: we know, that it is not for us to set bounds of our own about this sacred table, and say, "Thus low must you bow to us, before you take your seats there." This is a conduct, which we not only abhor, as inhumanity to you, but dread, as an insolent usurpation on the rights of our common Lord. If you have indeed tasted that the Lord is gracious, you will not sure be unwilling with meekness and modesty, to give some reason of the hope that is in you (b): and blessed be God, we have not so learned Christ (c) as to make our own phrases, or forms, or any thing singular in our own experiences, or the customs of our own society, the standard by which we judge either of the faith, or the piety of our brethren.

3. You may, perhaps, farther plead, that  
 "you fear, lest if you should enter into  
 "the church, you should dishonour it by  
 "an unsuitable behaviour, which might

(a) Rev. xxii. 17.

(b) 1 Pet. iii. 15.

(c) Eph. ix. 20.

“bring a reproach on religion, and its bles-

“sed author.”

But give me leave to say, that this very fear argues such a tenderness, and such a humility of soul, as may in a great measure answer itself. I hope you go forth in the strength of the Lord, as well as making mention of his righteousness alone (a): and you must know, that if a bare possibility of falling into sin were to exclude from this ordinance, the most confirmed christian upon earth could not dare to approach it. But while you see your own weakness, and maintain on the one hand, such a jealousy over yourselves, and on the other, such a zeal for the honour of religion, it is a certain evidence, that you are not yet left of God, and a most comfortable sign, that he will never forsake you. Nay, I will add that I know none more likely to prove the ornaments of a society, than those who have such humble apprehension, lest they should prove its reproach.

4. Others may be ready to excuse their absenting themselves from this ordinance, “because it is so commonly neglected by “professing christians.”

Now as for this, I bless God, it is far from being a singular thing amongst us, to see the table of the Lord furnished with guests, and young christians taking their places there. I speak it with great pleasure and thankfulness. But suppose it were otherwise; what if the neglect of this institution were much more common, both amongst the aged and the young,

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than it is in most worshipping assemblies ; could you have the heart to draw an argument from thence ? “ My dearest friend, my most gracious benefactor, is generally neglected ; his dying command, his dying love, is in a great measure forgotten ; and therefore I will forget him, and I will neglect him.” Say christians, could a generous mind reconcile itself to such a thought ? Could a pious soul draw such a consequence as this ? Methinks the argument lies quite the contrary way : “ therefore, oh my compassionate Saviour, will I attend with the greater solicitude, that I may, if possible, shame others out of their neglect ; or at least, may in part supply their lack of service, and bear my own testimony against an ungrateful generation, who call themselves thy disciples, and neglect this distinguishing badge of their profession, this gracious memorial of thy dying love.”

5. Others may plead “ the apprehensions of aggravated guilt, and ruin, if, after sacramental engagements, they should apostatize from God.”

To this I answer, that I hope you, my friends are not so unacquainted with the nature of this ordinance, and the constitution of the gospel, as to imagine that it consigns us over to certain damnation, if in any instance we afterwards deviate from the paths of our duty ; for if it were so, who then could be saved (a). ? But it is probable, your fears refer to total apostacy. If so, I readily own that, should this be the

(a) Mat. xix. 25.

case, it would in a dreadful degree inflame your guilt, and aggravate your misery, that you had not only known the way of righteousness (a), but that you had eaten and drank in the presence of the Lord (b). But have you any thoughts of drawing back from him, that you are thus cautious to avoid an instituted ordinance, merely because, in that case it would aggravate your ruin? So would every prayer you offer, and every sermon you hear; but should that thought prevent your coming to the throne of Grace, or drive you from the house of God?

Nay, to strike home; I will add, that with regard to you, my friends, the caution comes too late. I speak of those, who have not only tasted of the good word of God, and of the powers of the world to come (c), but have made trial of the ways of wisdom and piety, and have had some experience in them; and as for you, I must plainly and faithfully declare, that it is not for you of all people in the world, to think of gentle flames, and tolerable damnation. No, my brethren, that hope, wretched as it is, if you shall fall away, is unavoidably cut off from you; and all your schemes must be for nothing less than certain salvation, and exalted glory.

And to your comfort let me tell you, that though it is always the duty of him, that thinketh he standeth, to take heed lest he fall (d); yet you have all imaginable reason to trust the promises of an everlasting covenant, and to rely upon the great Redeemer, who hath declared, that

(a) 2 Pet. ii. 21.

(b) Luke xiii. 26.

(c) Heb. vi. 5.

(d) 1 Cor. x. 12.

he will give unto his sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of his hand (*a*), or be able to separate them from his love (*b*). If then you fear the dreadful consequences of apostacy, which would, indeed, be dreadful beyond all your fears, keep near to him as the great shepherd; and let those very fears rather engage you to an early and diligent attendance on this, and every other appointed method of approach, than drive you away from it. It is most reasonable to say, "Since there are so many professors, that draw back even to perdition (*c*), I will wait upon the Lord, that I may renew my strength (*d*), and so be enabled to endure to the end (*e*), that I may receive the end of my faith in the "salvation of my soul (*f*)."  
If your fears operate thus, they may be a means of preventing the evil of which you are so apprehensive.

On the whole, I hope, that when you weigh all I have been saying, and compare it with whatever can be objected against it, you will be convinced of your duty, and engaged to an immediate compliance with it. I have enlarged so copiously on these things, that in the last place.

III. I can only mention two or three inferences, which will naturally arise from what I have been laying before you.

From hence we might infer, that great care ought to be taken to instruct youth in

(*a*) John x. 28. (*b*) Rom. viii. 39. (*c*) Heb. x. 39.

(*d*) Isa. xl. 32. (*e*) Mat. xxiv. 13. (*f*) 1 Pet. i. 9.

the principles of religion ; that they may not be destitute of such an acquaintance with them, as is one necessary part of preparation for this ordinance, though far from being alone sufficient.

We may also infer, that more aged christians ought carefully to cultivate serious impressions, which may be made on the minds of their children, servants, and others of the rising generation, that they may be engaged to an early compliance with their duty ; while on the other hand, great care ought surely to be taken that there be nothing rigorous and severe in the terms of admission, which may bear hard upon that modesty and tenderness of spirit, which is generally to be found in young christians, and most eminently in those of the most hopeful and amiable characters.

As for those of a more advanced age, who have lived in the continual neglect of this great and excellent institution, I hope they have long before this inferred the guilt and folly of their omission, which so evidently appears from all I have been saying, and it is attended with many other aggravations, which my time will not now permit me to mention.

I shall therefore conclude with observing, that those young persons, who, through grace, have been convinced of their duty in this instance, and brought to an early compliance with it, have abundant reason to reflect upon it with pleasure and thankfulness. I think it is one of the most important blessings of my life, that there are many such in the church here ; many who, through



the divine goodness, have lately been added to it. It would not be easy for me, my dear brethren and friends, to say how great pleasure your presence and society adds to my sacrament days; or what a delightful prospect it gives me, not only as to the comfort of my own more advanced age, but as to the support of religion here, when I am no longer amongst you. I, and our more aged friends, have reason to rejoice on this occasion; but surely you yourselves have much greater reason. Permit me to remind you, that it will be a most proper expression of your thankfulness, to labour with the utmost care to engage other young persons, your brethren and companions, to come and share with you in this feast. I hope your own experience of the pleasure and advantage which attends it, may be added to the other arguments I have been pleading. As for your own conduct, let me most affectionately intreat, and most solemnly charge you, not only by all other arguments, but by your sacramental vows; by the eyes of God, and of man, that are upon you; by all our expectations from you, and all your engagements to us; that as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so you would walk in him (a). And may Almighty Grace strengthen and quicken you in your progress; and crown that fair morning, which is opening upon us in so hopeful, in so delightful a manner, with a long, a bright, and a prosperous day! Amen.

(a) Col. ii. 6.

## SERMON V.

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### *The Orphan's Hope.*

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PSALM xxvii.

*When my Father and my Mother forsake me, then  
the Lord will take me up \*.*

**T**HERE are few precepts of the gospel, which will appear more easy to a humane and a generous mind, than that, in which we are required to weep with them that weep (*a*). And surely there are few circumstances of private life, which will more readily command our mournful sympathy, than those of that afflicted family, to the poor remains of which you will naturally, on the first hearing of these words, direct your thoughts, and, perhaps, your eyes too. The circumstances, of a family, which God hath broken with breach upon breach (*b*); of those distressed children, whose father and mother have forsaken them almost at once;

\* N. B. This sermon was preached at Ashley in Northamptonshire, March 6, 1725, to some young persons, whose father, mother, and sister, had all died of the small-pox a few days before.

(*a*) Rom. xii. 15.

(*b*) Job xvi. 14.

and who have since been visited with another stroke, which, if alone, had been very grievous, and when added to such a weight of former sorrows, is I fear, almost insupportable.

I believe all of you, who are acquainted with the case sincerely pity them, and wish their relief: but I am under some peculiar obligations to desire and attempt it; not only on account of my public character, but as I know the heart of an orphan, having myself been deprived of both my parents, at an age, in which it might reasonably be supposed a child should be most sensible of such a loss. I cannot recollect any scripture, which was then more comfortable, as I think none could have been more suitable to me, than this which is now before us; and I the rather choose to insist upon it, as it will naturally lead me into some reflections, which I hope, by the divine blessing, may be of general use. “When my father and  
“my mother forsake me, then the Lord will  
“take me up.”

As for the Psalm from whence these words are taken, we are told in the title, that it was composed by David, but are left to conjecture the particular occasion of it. Dr Patrick refers it to the latter end of his time, and to the combat that he had with the Philistines in his declining age; when we are told, that David waxed faint, and was in great danger of being killed by a giant, if Abishai, the brother of Joab, had not seasonably rescued him: upon which it is added, that his subjects swate, He should no more go out to battle, lest he should quench the light

Of Israel (*a*). To these words David is supposed to allude, when he says, the Lord is my light, and my salvation, whom shall I fear?—Mine enemies come upon me to eat up my flesh,—and I had fainted, unless I had believed (*b*). But I am rather inclined to conjecture, that this Psalm was composed by him in his younger years, when he was under persecution from Saul. There is not a line in it, which doth not agree to this supposition; and there are several verses which cannot so well be accommodated to the other; especially the 12th, in which he represents his dangers as arising from false witnesses. Now it is not easy to imagine, what mischief they could have done him amongst the Philistines who opposed him in a national, rather than a personal quarrel; but he expressly declares elsewhere, that the lying words of some treacherous persons had exasperated Saul against him (*c*); and complains of false tongues, in those Psalms, which are, by their title, fixed to this period of his history (*d*). I might add, that the words of the text seem to favour this supposition; for David doth not here say, that his father and mother had already forsaken him, but only speaks of it as what might happen. Now, as we are elsewhere told, that when David was but a lad, his father was an old man (*e*), it is very improbable, that both Jesse and his wife should have been living at the time of the Philistine

(*a*) 2 Sam. xxi, 15, 17. (*b*) Psal. xxvii, 1, 2, 13.

(*c*) 1 Sam. xxiv, 9. (*d*) Psal. lii, 2, 3, 4.—lvii, 4. and lix. 12.

(*e*) 1 Sam. xvii, 12.

war, when David himself was grown old and feeble.

If this argument be of weight to fix the general occasion of the Psalm, it is probable that this verse may lead us to the particular time of its composure. We are told, that when David had taken shelter at Adullam, from the violence of Saul, and had raised a band of men for his defence, he conveyed his father and mother to the king of Moab (*a*), desiring that, till providence had brought his affairs to a determination, that prince would shelter them from the fury of Saul, which might otherwise have proved fatal to them, as it had just before done to the priests of the Lord. Perhaps this was the pious reflection of David, about the time his parents were to remove: When my father and mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up. As if he should have said, "Though an host of my  
" enemies be encamping against me, and the  
" nation be rising in arms to oppose me; and  
" though I be forced to dismiss my aged pa-  
" rents, at a time when I have the greatest oc-  
" casion for their prudent advice, and their ten-  
" der consolations; yet this is my comfort, that  
" God is with me. He will supply what I  
" lose in them; he will take me up, and  
" nourish me as his own child, when their  
" parental tenderness can afford me no further  
" support."

The Words will naturally afford us these two plain remarks, which with the improvement

(*a*) 1 Sam. xxii, 3.



of them will be the foundation of the present discourse.

I. The dearest of our relatives, and the most valuable of our friends, may possibly forsake us.

II. When good men are abandoned by their dearest friends, they may find more in God than they have lost in them. When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.

I. The dearest of our relatives, and the most valuable of our friends, may possibly forsake us.

You see David speaks of it, as at least a supportable case, with regard to himself, that not only his followers, his companions, and his brethren, but even his father and his mother might forsake him. All the intimacy of relation, all the endearment of affection, could not secure him from being deserted by them. And this may be our own case;—our friends may abandon us through their own unkindness,—or God may remove them by the stroke of his providence.

1. Our dearest friends may abandon us through their own unkindness.

It is the remarkable saying of one, who had made many serious reflections on this head \* ;  
“ If you put so much confidence in any friend,  
“ as not to consider, that it is possible he may  
“ become your enemy, you know man but little,  
“ and perhaps may be taught to know  
“ him better to your cost.” Change of cir-

\* Mr Baxter.

cumstances, contrariety of interest, our own mistakes, the misrepresentations of others, and sometimes mere caprice, and inconstancy of temper, render those indifferent, and perhaps averse to each other, who were once united in the bonds of the most endearing friendship. Nay, it is certain, that sometimes an immoderate and ungoverned fondness on both sides, may not only justly provoke God to disappoint our hopes from each other; but may prove, in its natural consequences, an occasion of mutual disgust, and perhaps of separation. For, when the mind labours under this disorder, it contracts a kind of sickly peevishness, which turns every trifling neglect into an offence, and every offence into a crime; so that men find the extremes of love and hatred more nearly connected, than they could once have believed. Sudden fear, will drive away some friends when we are in danger; and a much meaner principle will lead others, who, in better days, have called themselves our friends, to abandon, and perhaps to censure, us, when we are reduced to low circumstances and so have the greatest need of their assistance.

Such is the vanity of human friendship. And I will add, that neither, on the one hand, the sincerity of our affection, nor the worth of our character, nor the urgency of our affairs; nor, on the other hand, the former appearance of goodness in them, nor the highest obligations of gratitude; nor yet, the nearest ties of blood, or alliance, can secure us from disappointment in this tender article. David and Job under the Old Testament, and Paul, and even his blessed

master, under the New, though all such excellent persons, were forsaken, and in several respects injured by their friends; nay, I may say, as to most of them, by pious friends too. Such treatment therefore may we meet with from ours, even from those to whom we are related in the bonds of nature as well as affection.—What union can be more strict and endearing, than that of marriage? Yet you know, Job complains, while he was in circumstances which might have drawn tears from the eyes of a stranger, that his wife seemed to have forgot, not only the tenderness of her sex, and the intimacy of her relation, but even all sense of common humanity towards him: My breath, says he, is strange to my wife, though I intreated her for the children's sake of mine own body (*a*).—From whom could we expect greater tenderness, than from parents to their children, especially from mothers to their infant offspring? Yet God expressly declares, what has indeed been seen in some amazing instances, that this may fail. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the child of her womb? The little tender creature, that she has borne in her body, that she has been used to lay in her bosom; the poor innocent, that never offended her; that has all his dependence upon her; whom nature would therefore prompt her most resolutely to defend, most tenderly to cherish; can she forget it? Yea, they may forget, saith the Lord (*b*). This strange case may happen; it may happen in repeated in-

(*a*) Job xix. 17.

(*b*) Isa. xlix. 15.

stances.—Thus may our dearest friends, and even our parents themselves, abandon us through their own unkindness. But be they ever so constant and affectionate, it is certain,

2. They may be taken away from us by the stroke of divine providence.

Whilst we are in the most delightful manner conversing with our friends, God may bring us into such circumstances, that we shall see ourselves obliged in duty to quit the dearest of them, possibly even contrary to their judgment and advice, as well as their importunate intreaties: or they may see themselves obliged, on the same principles, to quit us; so that we may seldom have the opportunity of seeing each other, and enjoying the pleasure of mutual converse.

But the severest trial is, when God sees fit to remove them by death. When that awful messenger gives the summons, we must part, though ever so desirous of continuing together: None can by any means deliver his brother from going down to the grave, nor give to God a ransom for him (*a*), though he should offer his own life under that view. Our fathers, where are they (*b*)? And I may add, where are many of our brethren of the same age, and once in the same station of life with ourselves? What multitudes of them are already removed by death! Perhaps, more than are left behind. We have followed them to the grave, we have left them in the dust, and their places that knew them, know them no more (*c*). And if we are not

(*a*) Psal. xlix. 7, 8. (*b*) Zech. i. 5. (*c*) Job vii. 10.

quickly taken ourselves, we must expect, that our breaches will soon be multiplied upon us; and that nothing will remain of those dear creatures, whom we now behold with tenderness, and with transport, but a mournful remembrance that we once enjoyed them, and a despair of recovering them again, till we meet in the eternal world.

I will only add one very obvious reflection upon this head, and then proceed to the next.

May the dearest of our friends so soon forsake us? Then how careful should we be, that we do not value them too highly, and love them too fondly?

We find in scripture, that the inconstancy, and the mortality of human nature, are each of them urged as an argument against trusting in man. Thus we are cautioned to take heed every one of his neighbour, and trust not in any brother; for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbour will walk with slanders (*a*). And elsewhere we are bid to cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of (*b*)? And how indeed can we reckon on any thing as certain, which is suspended on so uncertain a life? The words of Solomon are applicable to friends, as well as to riches, when he says, Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for they make themselves wings, and flee away; often swiftly and irrecoverably, as an eagle towards heaven (*c*). To set them up as idols therefore, in the place of God, is the readiest way to pro-

(*a*) Jer. ix. 4. (*b*) Isa. ii. 22. (*c*) Prov. xxiii. 5.



voke him to remove or embitter them ; and then our own iniquity, in this respect, will correct us (a). Our confident expectation from them will increase our perplexity and our shame, if they should forsake us through their own unkindness ; and our excessive fondness for them will add new pangs to the agonies of a last separation. One way, or another, they will prove broken reeds, that will not only fail and sink under us, but will go into our hand, and pierce it (b) with a wound, which will be deep and painful, in proportion to the stress with which we have leaned upon them. On the whole, then, let us love our friends heartily, but let us love them cautiously, as changeable, and as mortal creatures ; and, from a conviction that it is possible they may forsake us, let us make it our greatest care to secure an interest in such consolations, as may be a support to us when they do. Which leads me to the second observation :

II. That when good men are abandoned by their dearest friends, they may find more in God than they have lost in them.

So David, in the text, declares his assurance, that when his father and his mother forsook him, then the Lord would take him up ; i. e. would approve himself a friend and a father to him. And if we be Christians indeed, we may promise ourselves all that tenderness and care from him, which David, and other saints of old, expected and found. He hath said to every one of us, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

(a) Jer. ii. 19.

(b) Isa. xxxvi. 6.

(a); and for our peculiar support under the loss of the dearest and most useful relatives he has more particularly added, it father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation (b).

When our friends are dead, we are generally more sensible of their value than we were before; but let the tenderest heart under the immediate impression of this severe calamity, set itself to paint the character of a departed friend in all its most amiable colours; let it reckon up all the advantages, which fondness could have taught it to hope for; and I will answer for it, that all this, and a great deal more, is to be found in God. Let the dejected orphan, that is even now weeping over the dust of a parent, yea, of both its parents, say what these parents, in the greatest supposable advantages of character and circumstance, could have done for its support, and its consolation; and the complaints of the most pathetic sorrow shall suggest thoughts which may serve, in a great measure, to answer themselves, and to engage the mind joyfully to acquiesce in the divine care, though deserted by the best of parents, or any other friends, however hopeful or useful.

“Alas,” will a dutiful and affectionate child be ready to say, in such a circumstance, “Do you ask, what my parents were? They were my dearest, my kindest, my most valuable friends;—Their counsels guided me;—their care protected me;—their daily converse was the joy of my life;—their tender condolence

“revived me under my sorrows;—their liberal  
“bounty supplied my necessities. Is it to be in-  
“quired, what they were? Say rather, what  
“were they not? And now they are gone,  
“where must I seek such friends? And how  
“justly may I say, that my dearest comforts  
“and hopes lie buried with their precious re-  
“mains.”

Let us more particularly survey each of these thoughts, and consider, with how much greater advantage each of these particulars is to be found in the paternal care and favour of God.

1. Could your parents have advised you in difficulties and perplexities? God is much more able to do it.

You will perhaps say, “Our poor giddy un-  
“practised minds have been hurried with a va-  
“riety of schemes and projects, and we have  
“soon found ourselves bewildered and lost; but  
“then it has been the greatest pleasure to us to  
“apply to our parents, from whose more ad-  
“vanced age, and riper experience, we might  
“well hope for considerable assistance. We  
“were sure they would not upbraid our igno-  
“rance, or despise us for our weakness; but  
“would give us their best advice, with endear-  
“ing tenderness and a cordial concern for our  
“welfare.” I allow, my friends, that if they  
were wise and good, (which we now suppose),  
they were valuable counsellors indeed; and that  
it was your duty, and your happiness, to use  
them as such while living, and as such to lament  
them now they are here no more. Yet, were  
they ever so prudent, you must still acknowledge

they were fallible creatures. They could only form probable conjectures concerning the future consequences of things; and as those conjectures were always precarious, so, no doubt, they were sometimes erroneous; and you were, perhaps, in some instances, misled by their mistaken apprehensions. But the only wise God knows the end from the beginning; his views of the most distant futurities are not conjectural, but certain; and his wisdom is far more superior to that of the most sagacious and experienced mortal, than the wisdom of such a mortal can be superior to that of an infant. It is he that teaches man knowledge (*a*), in whatever degree he possesses it. He instructed our parents, that they might instruct us; and he has expressly promised his direction to all those that humbly seek it. The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way (*b*). You may therefore, according to his own instruction and command, cry unto him, My father, thou art the guide of my youth (*c*); and you will find him such a guide, as can give wisdom to the simple, and to the young man knowledge and discretion (*d*).

2. Could your earthly parents have protected you from injuries? God is much more able to do it.

Nature has implanted, even in irrational animals, such a regard to the safety of their offspring, that many of the most weak and timorous of them become strangely courageous in

(*a*) Psal. xciv. 10.

(*b*) Psal. xxv. 9.

(*c*) Jer. iii. 9.

(*d*) Prov. i. 4.

their defence. The little bird that will at other times fly from every noise and every motion, will hover over her young, when they are assaulted with danger; and, rather than she will forsake them, will share in their ruin. It is easy to perceive the spirit of parents naturally rise on the least injury that is offered to their children, even sometimes when it is only accidental, and undesigned; and all the professed enemies of their children, they of course reckon to be their own. Nor do they only watch over them in their infancy and childhood, to defend them from the many dangers which surround those tender days; but in more advanced years, they are ready to use all their power, and their influence, to shelter them from the unworthy usage which they might otherwise expect from an ill-natured world: and I own, it is a very melancholy thing for young people to loose such a guard, at a time when they are most exposed.

But surely the defence of the Almighty must be a much juster and nobler confidence. It is amazing to observe, in how condescending a manner he expresses his care for the protection of his people. In one place he says, He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of his eye (*a*); and elsewhere, He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wing shalt thou trust (*b*); i. e. he shall defend thee, as the bird shelters her little helpless brood, from the assault of any thing that would injure or destroy them. And could we desire a better guard? There are many seasons, when our earthly parents must

(*a*) Zech. ii. 8.

(*b*) Psal. xci. 4.



of necessity be separated from us ; and a thousand calamities might overtake and destroy us, even in their presence, while they stood by helpless and amazed ; but God is always with his children, and as there is no danger of ours unseen by him, there can be none, from which he is not able to deliver us. When David was forsaken by his father and mother, and surrounded with a whole army of inhuman enemies, he speaks of this as his comfort, The Lord is my light, and my salvation ; whom shall I fear ; The Lord is the strength of my life : of whom shall I be afraid ? Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear ; though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident (a) : for in his help I shall be safe, though I stood single against united legions.

3. Did you hope for agreeable entertainment in the company of your earthly parents ? You may expect far nobler pleasure in conversing with God.

I acknowledge there is something peculiarly delightful in the company of a wise, a pious, and an indulgent parent ; and I doubt not, but many of us can easily recollect it. Even in our infant days, when we were fondly prattling to them, we, perhaps, often saw smiles of complacency sitting on their cheeks, and even tears of tenderness and pleasure rising in their eyes ; especially if, with the dawnings of reason, they discovered, in our minds, any early impressions of religion : we can perhaps recollect the con-

(a) Psal. xxvii. 1, 3.

descending air with which they talked to us, and the kind caresses which they intermingled with the discourse. And as we grew up to a riper understanding, we were still more charmed with the company of such parents. We had not only the manly pleasure of rational converse but there was a mixture of reverence and of gratitude in our hearts which much increased the delight. We were assured of their candour towards their children, and their prejudice in favour of what we might say; and that inspired us with spirit and cheerfulness. We were encouraged to attempt to please them, because we concluded we might easily do it; and the sense we had of the superiority on their parts, made every expression of their kindness so much the more sweet and obliging.

The loss of such conversation is indeed to be greatly lamented; and it would argue a strange mixture of stupidity and inhumanity to be unaffected with it. But still remember, that though your parents are gone, you are not left entirely alone; for, not to mention other surviving friends, your heavenly father is with you, if it be your prevailing desire still to be with him. Though your father and your mother be removed, and you can no longer go to them, unless it be to mourn over their grave, and to mingle your tears with their dust; yet you may go to God, and with pleasure pour out your soul before him. And what you find in him, may give a more transporting exercise to those sweet affections which added a relish to the conversation of your earthly parents. The first

imperfect accents of prayer and praise will be a pleasing offering to him. Great and glorious as he is, he will bow down an indulgent ear, through Jesus, your dear elder brother; he will smile upon your souls, and allow you a holy freedom in all the endearments of filial converse.

Your earthly parents were not always at leisure, nor always in temper to receive your visits; but wherever you are, and whatever you are doing, God's gracious eye is always on his children; his indulgent ear is always open to their addresses. You may come and tell him how heartily you love him, how affectionate a sense you have of his favours how sincerely you are concerned for his interest in the world, and how earnestly desirous of taking every opportunity to advance it; how well you are satisfied with his paternal care, and how cheerfully you can refer yourselves to his wise and gracious disposal. Our Lord intimates, that we may use such a holy boldness with God, when he teaches us to say, *Our Father which art in heaven* (*a*); and the apostle farther expresses it, when he speaks of the spirit of adoption, as teaching us to cry, *Abba, father* (*b*.)

4. Could your earthly parents have pitied your sorrows and complaints? The like compassions may you expect from God, if you apply to him under the character of a father.

It is natural for a child, when any thing grieves it, to go to its parents, and complain to

(*a*) Mat. vi. 9.

(*b*) Rom. viii. 15.

them ; and if they cannot redress the grievance at least they will be ready to condole it. Now we are expressly told in the word of God, that, like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him (*a*). And how much more valuable are the compassions of a God, than those of our earthly parents could possibly have been ! In many cases theirs was only a mourning pity, and all that they could often do for our relief, was to sit down and weep over us ; to afflict themselves with us ; and to give us their company in distress : but the compassions of an almighty God can redress the grievances which he commiserates. Be our afflictions ever so many, or ever so great ; in sickness and in pain ; in the agonies of conscience or the agonies of death ; when parents and other friends are but miserable comforters (*b*), he alone can support the soul ; can sooth it into serenity and peace ; and can exalt it to the most triumphant joy.

5. Could your earthly parents have supplied your wants, and have made provision for your future subsistence ? God is infinitely more able and ready to do it for his children.

In our years of infancy, though we had hardly any thing we could call our own, we make ourselves easy in this, that our parents would take care of us ? and sometimes the circumstances of families are such, that their care is almost all that their children have to depend upon. When this is the case, none can wonder, that

(*a*) Psal. ciii. 13.

(*b*) Job. xvi. 2.

it is considered as a great aggravation of the loss. But surely, when God proclaims himself a father to the fatherless (*a*), he intends to suggest some encouragement to such helpless orphans as these; and it becomes them to take the comfort of it.

Earthly parents may sometimes be so indigent that they cannot, and sometimes so unkind that they will not, relieve their children, at least in such a proportion as their necessities require. But the most high God is the possessor of heaven and earth (*b*), and his goodness is as extensive as his dominion: we may therefore conclude, that he will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish (*c*). There is not one parent in ten thousand so unnatural, as that he could stand by, and see his child perish for hunger, while it was in the power of his hand to relieve him. Now our Lord hath taught us to argue thus, if ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly father give good things unto them that ask him (*d*)?

God has the estates, and the hearts of all in his hands; and therefore can, with the utmost ease, raise up friends to us in the most abandoned circumstances, who shall act the part of parents to us, and do more for us than they could have done. And it is farther to be remembered, that the bounties of God are far more excellent than those of any mortal friend could possibly be. Their bounty, be it ever so great

(*a*) Psal. lxxviii. 5. (*b*) Gen. xiv. 19. (*c*) Prov. x. 3.

(*d*) Mat. vii. 11.



cannot reach beyond the grave; but it is our father's good pleasure to give us a kingdom (a), incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away (b): in the believing, though distant views of which, we are rich amidst the extremest poverty, and happy in the most miserable circumstances that can be consistent with such a hope.

You see then, on the whole, how much more the good man may find in God, than he can possibly lose in the most valuable earthly parents.

It only remains, that I conclude the discourse with a few reflections on this second observation.

1. Let us thankfully acknowledge the gracious provision which God has made to support his people under the loss of parents and friends.

We should bless his name, that he does not leave us to sink under the burden; or at best to collect some uncertain comfort from the precarious conclusions of our unassisted reason: but that, through the blood and righteousness of his Son, he has given his plain and express promise for the encouragement of such inconsiderable and undeserving creatures.

You, whose parents are living, ought to be thankful, that God hath provided such reviving cordials for you against the mournful time when they may be taken away.

And we, who have lost our parents, and have found relief in our extremities, from such de-

(a) Luke xii 32.

(b) 1 Pet. i. 4.

clarations as these, should recollect it with pleasure, and often repeat our songs of grateful acknowledgment.

And I will farther add, we ought not only to rejoice and to be thankful on our own account, but also on account of those afflicted friends who may receive support from such strong consolations. We pity children that have lost their parents, and it is delightful to see other generous persons rising up to take care of the orphans, and in some respect to make up their loss. But how much more delightful it should be to us, to hear an Almighty God proclaiming himself as their great guardian, and saying, that when their father and their mother forsake them, he will graciously take them up. How should we rejoice, that when we set ourselves to comfort and encourage them, we cannot only advance our own conjectures, but can thus speak to them in the language of God himself. And indeed this reflection may be applied to all the other promises. We ought to rejoice, that our pious friends have an interest in them, and that God hath consulted their support and consolation, as well as our own.

And surely, when we are reflecting upon such a promise as this, our affectionate thoughts and praises should arise to him, in whom all the promises of God are Yea and Amen (a.) It is natural to say "whence is it that thou, the  
" holy majesty of heaven, wilt appear under  
" such endearing and tender characters to sin-  
" ful mortals! that thou wilt speak of taking

(a.) 2. Cor. i. 20.

“ them up ! of bestowing one gracious look up-  
 “ on them, and much more of extending an arm  
 “ of mercy to raise them from that helpless con-  
 “ dition, in which they naturally lie, like aban-  
 “ doned out-casts ( Whence is it that thou  
 “ wilt take them into thy family now, and into  
 “ thy kingdom at last ? ” for all this is intima-  
 ted in this expression). “ Lord,” may each of  
 us say “ I humbly ascribe it to the riches of thy  
 “ gospel grace. I would declare it to the e-  
 “ verlasting honour of Jesus thy son, that it  
 “ is through him we have received the adop-  
 “ tion.”

2. What an engagement should this be to young persons, to endeavour to secure an interest in God through Christ !

You must own the consolations, which I have now been representing, to be far from being small (*a*) ; and surely, when you consider how soon the best of your mortal friends may fail, you cannot but wish for an interest in them : but you wish it in vain unless you seek it in the gospel way ; unless you deliberately and resolutely choose God for your father in Christ, and devote yourselves to them in the bonds of an everlasting covenant. If you refuse this, you have reason to regard him under the character of an enemy ; and to fear, that when he removes your friends, it is in judgment that he visits you with such a blow. Your hearts may justly meditate terror, if this be the case ; especially when your pious parents are taken away, You are then deprived of their prayers, their

exhortation, their advices, and their examples ; and to seem to be thrown farther out of the way of repentance and reformation. And let me add, that if almighty grace doth not prevent it, the trouble which you now feel, in being separated from such dear relations, while you continue on earth, will be the smallest part of your unhappiness ; for you must finally be separated not only from all the most valuable persons you have ever known here, but, which is infinitely more, from the presence of the blessed God himself ; must fall unpitied victims of the divine justice, and be delivered over to dwell with your father the devil, whose works you have chosen to do (a). And oh ! how unutterably dreadful is it to think, that in the awful day, when this sentence is to be pronounced and executed upon you, there will not be one friend to plead in your favour ! That though your pious parents be then present, yet, in a most terrible sense, father and mother will then forsake you indeed ; and, instead of interposing their intreaties for you, will applaud the righteous vengeance that dooms you as obstinate rebels to eternal death ; to those abodes of distinguished misery which are prepared for such as have broke through all the peculiar advantages which will then be found chargeable to your account.

3. Let what I have been saying be considered by parents, as an encouragement cheerfully to leave their religious children in the hands of God when provi-

(a) John viii. 44.

dence shall see fit to make the separation.

When, through the riches of gospel-grace, a christian parent sees his own eternal concerns so safe in a Redeemer's hands, that he can say, with respect to them, I desire to depart (a); yet sometimes he feels reluctance mingling itself with the holy desire, when he considers that he must leave his dear children behind him; perhaps in a destitute, and always, if they be very young, in a hazardous condition. And this thought presses with peculiar weight on the minds of those who have lost the companion of their lives; as, upon their decease, their children will become entirely orphans. But may it not revive you, to hear, that God will be their guardian, if they be willing to choose him as such? Surely you may be abundantly satisfied with his care. Alas! what were you yourselves, with all your parental tenderness, but instruments which God made use of for conveying some few of his favours to them? And cannot he do that by others which he hath long been doing by you? Distrust not his power or his faithfulness; but turn all your anxious care about future events, into a religious concern to do your duty to your children, and, by all the most prudent and affectionate methods of address, to lead them into the early knowledge of God in Christ; that so, through the mercies of an everlasting covenant, they may stand intitled to the special protection of an heavenly father, who can never be separated from them; and



who, as he is never unable, will never prove unwilling, to help them. Once more ;

4. Let distressed orphans have an immediate and frequent recourse to such supporting considerations as these ;—

Do not allow yourselves to suspect the truth of these exceeding great and precious promises (a), which have now been set before you ; and, for your farther encouragement, consider in how many instances they have been confirmed by experience.

There are, my friends, I am sure there are those amongst us this day, who can set their seal to the truth of what has now been spoken ; and can say, in the language of the text, that when our father and our mother did both of them forsake us, then the Lord actually took us up, and proved a most gracious parent to us. He supplied the breaches that he had made, and by a train of providence, which we cannot but admire in the review, raised up other friends for us ; and, it may be, inspired almost with the tenderness of parents, persons, who were ever unknown to us, when the last of our parents was taken away. Nay, perhaps, some of us may say, that the death of a valuable parent, which we feared would be our ruin, has proved, in some of its then unthought of consequences, on the whole, a very great mercy to us.

Let such reflections as these encourage you, my young friends, for whose admonitions and consolation this discourse was peculiarly intended, to hope, that as your afflictions are the same,

your consolations will also be the same. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid (a). Your father and mother are dead, but your heavenly father can never die. I would willingly hope, that it has been your early care to secure an interest in him ; and I would solemnly charge it upon you, as you value your present peace or your eternal happiness, that it be the great business of your life to keep close to him : and then you may assure yourselves with the most cheerful confidence, that he will never fail nor forsake you (b).

If therefore your hearts are almost overwhelmed within you, in the melancholy circumstances into which his providence has brought you, fly into his presence, prostrate yourselves before him with humble importunity, and turn your tears of sorrow into tears of devotion.

“ Behold, Oh most compassionate father,” may you reasonably and confidently say, “ behold thou hast plunged me even into the depths of distress: but blessed be thy name, thou hast not left me to sink in them, without any support. I have this day received some kind assurances from thy word, and I now intreat thee to remember that word unto thy servant, upon which thou has caused me to hope (c). My father and my mother have forsaken me : Lord wilt thou not take me up ? Wilt thou indeed abandon me ? Wilt thou add affliction to the afflicted ? The insupportable affliction of seeing myself deserted by thee, when I

(a) John xiv. 17. (b) Deut. xxxi. 8. (c) Psal. cxix. 49.

“ must evidently need thy succour ? That be far  
“ from thee, Oh Lord ! and be the unworthy  
“ suspicion far from me !—I have lost my most  
“ prudent and faithful counsellors, but I look  
“ unto thee, as the guide of my youth. I have  
“ lost those who were once my guardians and  
“ my protectors ; but I am come to take shelter  
“ under the shadow of thy wings.—Their eyes  
“ are closed, and their mouths are sealed up in  
“ death ; no longer can they look with compas-  
“ sion on my sorrows ; no longer can their con-  
“ verse cheer or delight me. Oh ! may thy com-  
“ passionate eye regard me, and thy comforts  
“ delight my soul ! Permit me, oh God ! an  
“ humble freedom in approaching to thee, and  
“ in pouring forth all my heart in thy presence.  
“ —My parents are now returned naked to their  
“ dust, and, should my wants be ever so pres-  
“ sing, are now incapable of affording me any  
“ relief. May thy rich bounty supply me, thy  
“ unwearied providence take care of me ! But,  
“ above all, with-hold not thy covenant bles-  
“ sings, and let me share in that eternal inheri-  
“ tance which thou hast prepared for all thy  
“ children in Christ.”

If these be the daily breathings of your souls before him, you have abundant reason to hope, that he will return an answer of peace. In all your difficulties he will wisely direct you ; in all your sorrows he will compassionately relieve you : in all your dangers he will powerfully protect you ; in all your wants he will bountifully supply you ; in a word you will be conducted safely, and I hope, notwithstanding this gloomy

prospect, you will be conducted comfortably, through this mortal life, till you come at length to your father's house in peace (a). And when you are arrived thither, and take a view of all the various occurrences of the way, you will see apparent reason to acknowledge, what is now so difficult to believe, that the present awful dispensation was sent with a gracious design, and that all the paths of your heavenly father have been mercy and truth to you (b). Amen.

(a) Gen. xxviii. 21.

(b) Psal. xxv. 10.

## SERMON VI.

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*The Reflections of a pious Parent on the Death of a wicked child, considered and improved.*

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2 SAM. xviii. 33.

*And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept; and as he went, thus he said; O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!*

**A**S the providence of God calls me this day particularly to address myself to young persons, so the words I have been reading suggest some very awful thoughts, which are well suited to such an occasion. And there is one circumstance, relating to this discourse which I cannot forbear mentioning to you, because I hope it may be a means of engaging a more than common attention to it, from the auditory to which I am now speaking\*.

\* N. B. This sermon was preached at Kibworth in Leicestershire, towards the beginning of the year 1725, about



It is this: The substance of the sermon, which I am now to deliver, was drawn up some time ago, at the desire of your late reverend and worthy pastor Mr Jennings, and preached to a society of young persons then under his charge \*. The text was chosen by him; and his tender and obliging care to assist his pupils in their first labours, engaged him to draw the plan of the discourse, and to furnish me with several of the most important thoughts, which I am now to offer.

So that I think, I may properly say, that though your eyes will no more see him, nor your ears any more hear his persuasive voice, which has so frequently, and so affectionately, addressed you from this place, yet this day by me, he being dead, yet speaks (a), speaks to you young persons; to many of whom, I fear, he hath often spoken in vain. Let me, therefore, solemnly charge you, by your veneration for the memory of so excellent a friend, as well as by the authority of God, and the importance of your eternal interests, that you give these things a diligent hearing, a serious recollection, and a religious regard. And indeed, if such a subject, introduced by such a circumstance, will not command them all. I can have very little hopes

eighteen months after the death of the Rev. Mr John Jennings, who had long been minister there, and was author of those excellent discourses on Preaching Christ, and Experimental Preaching, which have met with such great acceptance at home and abroad.

\* i. e. At Hinkley, May 7, 1723.

(a) Heb. xi. 4.

of impressing you, by what I may say in the course of my ordinary ministry amongst you.

The words of the text are the pathetic lamentation of good old David, on the death of Absalom; a favourite but wicked son. His pious father had no doubt given him a religious education; and it is very probable, that, considering the remarkable beauty and gracefulness of his person, he was ready to hope, that he would be endowed with virtuous and holy dispositions of soul, the correspondent beauties of the mind. But these hopes were dreadfully disappointed; for the darling, the beautiful Absalom, proved a murderer and a rebel; he went in unto his father's concubines, in the sight of all Israel (*a*), and openly attempted to take away the life of him, from whom his own was derived, and by whose indulgence it had been spared, even when forfeited to justice. Yet nevertheless David had such paternal tenderness, as, under all these crying provocations, expressly to order the generals of his army, to deal gently with the young man Absalom, for his sake (*b*). But the righteous vengeance of God determined it otherwise, and, notwithstanding all his father's fond precautions, brought him down to the grave with infamy and blood. He was snatched away by a violent and very terrible death, in the prime of his days, and the very act of his sin, and this was the occasion of those moving words, O my son, Absalom, my son, my son, Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!

(*a*) 2 Sam. xvi, 22.

(*b*) Ibid xviii. 5.

We may charitably, and I think very reasonably suppose, that they are not only the expressions of David's natural affection, on the death of a son whom he tenderly loved; but that they arose from the views of that state on which he entered by death, which must certainly be very dreadful; so dreadful, that David, whose eternal interests were secure by the promises of an everlasting covenant, would have been willing even by his own death to have delivered him from such complete and such hopeless ruin.

It will be my business from these words.

I. To consider the reflections which may naturally arise in the mind of a pious parent on the death of a wicked child. And,

II. To draw some inferences from such a survey. Oh! that all, and especially the degenerate children of religious parents, would attend with a becoming seriousness!

I. I am to consider the reflections which may naturally arise in the mind of a pious parent, on the death of a wicked child.

I cannot pretend to enumerate them all, or to describe them in such a pathetic language as a bleeding heart will speak itself on so sad an occasion; but probably the chief of them may be such as these;

1. A pious parent will reflect on such an occasion, that his expectations from his child have been sadly disappointed in the last course of its life.

Parents are apt to flatter themselves with fond hopes from their infant offspring; they

look upon them as the blossoms of future delight and support. They comfort themselves under the other burdens of life, and the additional cares and labours which a growing family brings upon them, by looking forward to future years, and anticipating the pleasures hereafter to arise from the duty, gratitude, and usefulness of their children. "But alas!" will the good man say, "Could I have seen what this poor creature would have proved, instead of rejoicing in his birth, I should have mourned over it as a calamity to me and my family. I promised myself other things. My heart trembled for him in the various dangers of infancy and childhood. I congratulated myself on his arrival at a more confirmed age. But when I looked that this pleasant plant should have brought forth grapes, behold, it brought forth wild grapes (a). Well did Solomon say, A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him (b). So, alas, have we found. Oh! how often has our authority, been affronted, and our love slighted, for a mere trifle? Or when he was treating us better, what a thorn has it been in our very hearts, to think that our child was in a state of spiritual death, and on the borders of that eternal ruin, into which we have reason to fear he is now fallen. So that with regard to what is past, we have cause to say, Blessed, in comparison of us, are the barren, that never bare, and the breasts that never gave suck (c)." These

thoughts will be aggravated, when, in the next place,

2. The pious parent reflects with concern on the fruitless pains he has taken for the reformation and conversion of his child.

“He that searches my heart,” will the christian say, “is witness, that next to its concern for my own salvation, it knows not a more affectionate wish than this, that Christ might be formed in the soul of my children (a). That how little soever of this world I could give them, they might be the children of God, and the heirs of glory. And with relation to this unhappy creature, I was not entirely wanting in such endeavours as lay in my power. What knowledge of the things of God I myself had, I was willing to communicate to him; I urged them seriously upon him; I frequently reminded him of them; and, to supply the defects of my personal instructions, I put the book of God into his hands, and engaged him in an early and constant attendance on public ordinances. When I saw him wandering in the paths of folly and sin, I endeavoured to convince him of the fatal consequences of such courses, and in the most affectionate manner to dissuade him from them. I have again and again urged him to pray for himself; and I have frequently been praying for him. I have desired that he might be remembered in our worshipping assemblies; I have borne him on my heart before God in the family and the closet, and God alone

(a) Gal. iv. 19.



“ knows with what overflowing tenderness.  
“ How importunately have I pleaded, and how  
“ unwilling have I been to take any denial!  
“ But alas ! all my prayers and my tears have  
“ been like water spilt on the ground ; and in  
“ all the the endeavours I have been using for his  
“ conversion and salvation, I have been labour-  
“ ing in vain, and spending my time and my  
“ strength for nought (a). Nay as to him it  
“ has proved worse than in vain ; for every in-  
“ struction, and every correction, every reproof  
“ and every prayer, has aggravated his guilt,  
“ and increased his misery ; so that on the whole  
“ while I thought I was acting the kindest and  
“ most affectionate part, I was only treasuring  
“ up for my child aggravated wrath and dam-  
“ nation.” But this leads me to add,

3. That the pious parent, on such an occasion,  
cannot but deeply reflect on that state of  
everlasting ruin, into which he has reason  
to fear that his child is fallen.

“ Oh !” will the afflicted christian say, “ how  
“ comparatively light would my sorrows be, if,  
“ while I am looking on the breathless corpse,  
“ and mourning the disappointment of my hopes  
“ as to the present life. I could by faith look  
“ forward to a world of glory, and see the  
“ branch of my family which is cut off from  
“ earth, transplanted thither, and flourishing  
“ there ; joy would then mingle itself with my  
“ parental sorrows, and praises with my tears.  
“ But alas ! I have reason to apprehend, it was  
“ cut down that it might be cast into the bur-

" nings. On the former supposition I might  
 " have comforted myself with the thought of  
 " meeting my child again, of meeting him on  
 " terms of infinite advantage, no more to be  
 " separated from him. But now alas ! I have  
 " not only lost my child for a while, but I have  
 " lost him for ever ; for the unhappy creature  
 " died a stranger to God and Christ, and there-  
 " fore what can I imagine, but that he has fallen  
 " into the hands of divine vengeance ? Over-  
 " whelming thought ! while he lived, my bow-  
 " els yearned for him when he was under any  
 " affliction ; when I saw him struggling with  
 " illness and pain, I pitied him, and I wept over  
 " him. Oh, how can I bear to think, that he  
 " is now tormented in that flame (a), and that  
 " God is pouring forth on him the vials of his  
 " wrath ! Oh ! that the blood of the parent  
 " could redeem the soul of the child, how wil-  
 " lingly, how gladly, would I part with it !—O  
 " my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom !  
 " Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom,  
 " my son, my son !" But once more,

4. The pious parent cannot but be much dis-  
 tressed in such circumstances as this, at the  
 thoughts of meeting his child at the tribu-  
 nal of Christ.

" It would be mournful," may the good  
 man say, " to think that I should see him no  
 " more ; yet as the matter now stands, even  
 " that would be some alleviation of my distress :  
 " but the immutable decrees of God forbid it.  
 " I know, that when all the dead, small and

“ great, stand before his throne (a), I and my  
“ child must appear together there; and oh!  
“ what a dreadful interview will it be! when  
“ God committed his education to my care, he  
“ did, as it were, put his soul into my hands,  
“ and at my hands will he require an account  
“ of it. And when he comes to make the in-  
“ quiry, what will the issue be? Will my son  
“ accuse me? Or must I be a witness against  
“ him? How terrible an office! to bear my  
“ testimony for the condemnation of one whom  
“ I tenderly loved, of one whose soul I would  
“ have died to deliver! I know I shall not dare  
“ to interpose in his favour, and plead the cause  
“ of my Saviour’s enemy; or, if I were so far  
“ transported by the fondness of a father, I  
“ should plead in vain. Sooner, much sooner,  
“ would the mountains be removed for me, or  
“ the earth carried out of its place, (b), than  
“ the sentence of heaven, the final solemn sen-  
“ tence would be repealed. And if it must not  
“ be repealed, how shall I bear to hear it pro-  
“ nounced, to see it executed; to hear my own  
“ child separated by an everlasting curse from the  
“ presence of the Lord; to see the ministers of  
“ divine wrath, hurrying away the helpless crea-  
“ ture, and dragging him down to unquench-  
“ able burnings? Oh that, if no shelter must  
“ be allowed him, God would hide me in  
“ the grave till this tremendous scene of his in-  
“ dignation be overpast; lest the anguish of a  
“ parent mingle itself with the joys of a  
“ rising saint, and to me, overcast the triumphs

(a) Rev. xx. 12.

(b) Job. xviii. 4.

“of the day !” Hardly can a good man refrain from such sentiments as these, though some of them be dictated by passion, rather than by reason.

After this survey of the reflections, which such a sad event might naturally produce, I would proceed to draw some inferences from it; yet I cannot but delay them for a few moments, in compassion to the sorrows of those pious parents, if any be such amongst us, whose case this has been. Are there any of you, christians, that experimentally know the anguish of such thoughts as these? Any of you, that have thus been mourning over your dead children, when God has on a sudden called them to his bar, with all their follies and sins on their head, without giving you any probable hope, that his grace had first recalled them to himself, and washed their souls in the blood of a Redeemer?

It grieves me, my friends to have been forced by a sense of duty, as I have now been, so largely to represent a scene which must call up your sorrows afresh. But permit me to remind you, that, even in this dreadful circumstance, the consolations of God are not small (a). Your hopes in your children have been sadly blasted; but you have hopes in God, your heavenly father, which nothing can shake. You have reason to fear, their souls are lost; but it is nothing to you to reflect, that your own are given you as a prey? And that though your house be not so with God, as in this respect

you could most affectionately wish it, yet he has made with you an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure (a). As to these unhappy creatures who are now lost, you have indeed laboured in vain, and spent your strength for nought; but still your work is with the Lord, and your reward with your God (b); and you, like the faithful minister, may hope, that you shall be unto God a sweet savour of Christ, not only in them that are saved, but even in them that perish (c). And, as to the final interview, which appears so grievous in the prospect, remember, that you are not to carry along with you the fond instincts of nature into a world of perfection and glory. All your passions will then be refined; your wills so entirely resolved into the will of God, and your souls so completely satisfied with his presence and his love, that no creature regards will be able to disturb their sacred serenity. You will look on the whole assembly of the enemies of God with so deep an apprehension of the malignity of their character, and of the wisdom and equity of that divine sentence by which they fall, that you will not distinguish any of them from the rest, by the sentiments of a painful compassion. Nor will your concern for those of them, who now lie nearest to your heart, prevent your concurrence in that song of triumph, so proper to the solemnities of that awful day: Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou king

(a) 1 Sam. xxiii. 5.

(b) Isa. xlix. 4, 5.

(c) 2 Cor. ii. 15.



of saints (*a*), in the mean time let the expectation of so happy an improvement in your temper moderate the excess of your present sorrows: and when they are moderated aright, the remainder of them will be a sadness of the countenance, by which the heart may be made better (*b*). And now,

II. I proceed to draw some inferences from the sad survey we have been taking, of the pious parent's reflections on the death of a wicked child. And hence we may infer,

1. That wicked children are acting a very cruel and unnatural part, while they are exposing their pious parents to such reflections as these.

I say it with a sorrowful heart, but so it is, that I fear there are several of you, my young friends who live in the neglect of your own souls, and whose consciences will presently charge it upon you. How soon that awful being, whom you now forget, may cut off the number of your months in the midst (*c*), and add you to the number of the dead, you know not; but this is certain, that if you die as you live, and your parents survive the stroke, they will feel the weight of these terrible reflections; and even now they cannot but fear them. Doubtless, if they be present here their hearts are bleeding whilst I speak, and they are looking upon you with unknown anguish. And does not the thought grieve you, and does it not shame you? Ungrateful creatures! are these your returns for all their bounty, for all their

(*a*) Rev. xv. 3. (*b*) Eccles. vii. 5. (*c*) Job xxi. 21.

tenderness; to be a sword in their bowels, and to pierce their very hearts? Alas, they did not expect such scenes as these, when you hung about them with your infant arms; when you answered their fond smiles, and lisped out the first broken accents of endearment. I wonder how you can bear the thought! I wonder you are not ashamed to be conversing with them daily, and daily receiving new favours from them; while you are behaving in such a manner, that, the better they love you, the more they must be afflicted and terrified for you. Oh, that you would have compassion on them! or, if this will not move you, oh that you would have compassion on yourselves! for your own interest is still much more nearly concerned than theirs. Which leads me to add,

2. We may farther infer that a dreadful counterpart to those reflections will be the portion of the ungodly child.

Alas, sinners, if your pious parents weep thus for you, how bitterly will you weep for yourselves! for if these things be done in a green tree, what will be done in the dry (a)! if they, the children God, perhaps even then under the smiles of their heavenly father, and in the near views of their own complete salvation, may utter their griefs, in such melting accents, what agonies will take hold of your hearts, when you are actually entered on those seats of horror and despair, to which the righteous vengeance of God has doomed you? It is impossible fully to describe them; yet something re-

(a) Luke xxiii, 28, 31.

lating to them we may certainly infer from what has been already said. Give me leave to offer it to your view, if peradventure, through the agency of divine grace, to have heard of these reflections may be the happy means of leading you to escape them.

Your parents may reflect "on the disappointment of their expectations from you." But oh, how heavy will the disappointment of your own hopes and expectations then sit upon your souls! how will you then bear it, sinners when you see all your enjoyments, and all your prospects blasted in a moment, and irrecoverably lost.

It is true, you are lifting up your souls unto vanity (a); but these vanities are your all. You pursue them with the utmost vigour and intenseness of mind, and have a great many fond and chimerical schemes for years of pleasure and happiness yet to come. But if God cut you off in the prime of your life, and in the very flower of your hopes, in that day all your thoughts will perish (b). And how will you be confounded to see all the beautiful and enchanted scenes that now charm you to the neglect of God and religion, vanish like the shadowy glories of a dream, and your souls left naked and destitute, upon an inhospitable shore, where, in all your indigence and distress, there will be no eye to pity you, no hand to relieve you!

And it will be so much the more dreadful, as you will go down to these melancholy regions

(a) Isa. xxiv. 4.

(b) Psal. cxlvi. 4.

with your appetites and your passions warm about you, and by frequent indulgence strengthened and inflamed; so that, for want of their proper objects, they will prey upon your heart, and an insatiable thirst will continue, while you will not have one drop of satisfaction or comfort. Nay, I may add, that as, in these unripened days, you have had little experience of the vanities and disappointments of life, and have entertained a great many fond and extravagant hopes of what you would never have found in it, your regret in being cut off from them, will not be in proportion to what they really were, but to what your error and folly imagined them to have been.

Your pious parents will reflect upon it with unutterable anguish, "that your souls are forever lost: But how much more sensibly will you yourselves feel it! They, in their present situation on earth, can have but a little faint and imperfect notion of the horrors of the infernal prison; for to those we may accommodate the language of the Apostle on a very different occasion, and say, that neither has eye seen them nor ear heard them, nor has it entered into the most terrified heart fully to conceive them (a). But how will the change affect you, when you are just entered on those realms of woe! when you look round about you, and think, this is my last abode, my only remaining inheritance! Alas, how will your hearts be overwhelmed when you compare that place of torment with all the cheerful scenes of the world from whence you came:

(a) 1 Cor. iii. 9.

where you had been surrounded with so many delights; where it had been your chief care to make provision for the flesh (*a*); and where you had, perhaps, spent your days in mirth, till in a moment you went down to the grave (*b*)! when, instead of the light of the sun, you see nothing but the flames of the divine indignation; when, instead of all that soothed and regaled your senses, you feel the never dying worm, and exchange the gay and agreeable companions that did surround you, for the society of devils and damned spirits!

I appeal to your consciences; can your hearts endure, or your hands be strong (*c*), in such a circumstance as this? You that are so impatient of every little anxiety of life; you, that cannot bear the fatigues of duty, nor the restraints of religion, how will you bear the agonies of damnation? How will you live in those doleful regions, where joy and cheerfulness are everlasting strangers, and nothing remains but weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth (*d*)?

Were this to be your case only for a thousand or a hundred years, how miserable would you be! but oh, how much more miserable, when you think, that it is an everlasting destruction (*e*)! when your thoughts weary themselves in search of some distant point, where a glimmering hope may break in upon you, and you go onward, and onward, and onward still, and find nothing but blackness of darkness for ever

(*a*) Rom. xiii. 14. (*b*) Job xxi. 13. (*c*) Ezek. xxii 14.

(*d*) Mat. xiii. 42.

(*e*) 2 Theff. i. 9.



(a)! when you feel yourselves plunged in a boundless ocean of distress, without a bottom, and without a shore! “must the smoke of my  
“torments ascend up for ever and ever (b)?  
“Must I lie in this infernal prison, till I have  
“paid the uttermost farthing (c)? Surely then  
“I must bear indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish (d), as long as an immortal soul can sustain it, as an eternal God can  
“inflict it.”

It is almost insupportable, to think that this should be the case of any of our fellow creatures. How much more insupportable must it then be, to feel that it is your own!

Again, your pious parents will lament, “that  
“all their kind endeavours for your salvation  
“were in vain.” But with what aggravated sorrow and despair would you then reflect on those endeavours, and on all the other religious advantages you enjoyed!

“Alas!” will you then be ready to say,  
“If there could be any thought of comfort in  
“the midst of this dark gloom of desolation and  
“horror, it would be to transfer the blame of my  
“ruin upon another. Oh that I could say, there  
“was some powerful, arbitrary being, by whose  
“irresistible hand I was forcibly borne away, as  
“by a mighty torrent, and swept into this burning gulph! Oh that I could say that I was  
“wicked and miserable by a fatal necessity: But  
“there is not a wretch, amidst all the rage and  
“blasphemy of such a dwelling as this, who

(a) Jude ver. 13. (b) Rev. xiv. 11. (c) Mat. v. 26.

(d) Rom. ii. 2.

“ can dare to assert that to have been the case,  
 “ how much less then can I assert it !

“ When I look up,” may you justly say,  
 “ when I look up to yonder seats of unapproach-  
 “ able glory, from whence I am now cast out,  
 “ as an abominable branch (a); why was not  
 “ my portion there? Wretch that I am, I was  
 “ once numbered among the children of the  
 “ kingdom; I was born in Immanuel’s land; I  
 “ was educated in a religious family: and oh, my  
 “ parents and my ministers ! how diligently did  
 “ they instruct me ! how awfully did they ad-  
 “ monish me ! how tenderly did they expostu-  
 “ late with me ! I had indeed line upon line,  
 “ and precept upon precept (b); and therefore  
 “ I have now stroke upon stroke, and wound up-  
 “ on wound. The blood of a Redeemer was  
 “ once offered me as a healing balm, and I de-  
 “ spised it ; and now it is poured out, as a burn-  
 “ ing corrosive on my bleeding soul. I was once  
 “ lifted up even to the gates of heaven, and now  
 “ I am cast down to the very centre of hell: I am  
 “ now looking with envy, and with rage, on  
 “ the milder torments of Tyre and Sidon, of So-  
 “ dom and Gomorrah (c).” There, sinners,  
 thou wilt perhaps curse the compassionate heart,  
 which now is almost sinking under this necessary  
 representation of thy danger, and those unavail-  
 ing tears, which one or other of us may now  
 be shedding, in the distant views of thy ruin.

Yet I must add once more, that as your pious  
 parents will tremble “ at the view of meeting  
 “ you at the tribunal of God,” so the thoughts,  
 (a) Isa. xiv. 13. (b) Isa. xxviii. 10. (c) Mat. xi. 21,—24.

of such an interview must be insupportably dreadful to you.

If Satan now draw you from your allegiance to God, and harden your heart to final impenitency, being partakers of his sins, you will be partakers likewise of his plagues (*a*), and like him, be reserved in chains of darkness to the judgment of the great day (*b*). And how will your haughty hearts brook it, when you are to be brought out to that judgment? oh, how often will your anxious, foreboding thoughts anticipate the shame and horror of that dreadful day!

“I must stand forth,” will you then say, I  
“must stand forth before my inexorable judge;  
“my sin and my folly must be publicly pro-  
“claimed before the assembled world, and my  
“parents too must be the witnesses of it. But  
“oh, how shall I be able to lift up my face be-  
“fore them, blackened with the marks of guilt  
“and despair! If I call, will there be any to  
“answer me; or to which of the saints shall I  
“then turn (*c*)? Shall I turn to my parents  
“and intreat them, by all their former tender-  
“ness for the children of their own bowels, to  
“plead with the judge in my favour, if, perhaps,  
“they may mitigate the rigour of his wrath?  
“Alas, I know him, and myself, and them too  
“well, to expect any such attempt, or to ask  
“any such favour. Will they not rather stand  
“up as swift witnesses against me (*d*), and call  
“for an increase of wrath on my guilty head?  
“Will not all their former tenderness be turned

(*a*) Rev. xviii. 4.    (*b*) 2 Pet. ii. 4. Jude ver. 6.

(*c*) Job v. 1.    (*d*) Mal. iii. 5.

“ unto stern and awful severity ? Will they not  
 “ upbraid me with their instructions, their re-  
 “ proofs, their prayers, and their tears ; and  
 “ applaud the triumphs of the divine vengeance,  
 “ in the condemnation of so wicked, of so in-  
 “ corrigible a creature ? ” — With these awful re-  
 monstrances I dismiss you, and conclude with a  
 reflection of a more comfortable nature.

3. From this survey of the reflections of a  
 pious parent on the death of a wicked  
 child, we may certainly infer, that the pa-  
 rents of religious children have abundant  
 reason of thankfulness.

They have reason of thankfulness, both as  
 they are free from such melancholy reflections  
 and apprehensions ; and as a foundation is laid  
 of other views, as full of chearfulness and joy,  
 as these are of terror and distress. My brethren,  
 I congratulate the happiness of those of you,  
 who can say, through grace, that God has esta-  
 blished his covenant with you, and with your  
 seed after you, for an everlasting covenant, to be  
 a God unto you, and unto them (*a*). It is the joy  
 of my heart, to think how much it must be the  
 joy of yours, to see your children walking in the  
 truth (*b*) ; and to see them flourishing in the  
 courts of your God (*c*), as well as growing like  
 olive plants round your own tables (*d*) ; to see,  
 that they have not only escaped the grosser cor-  
 ruptions, which are in the world through lust  
 (*e*) ; but subscribe with their hand unto the  
 Lord, and surname themselves by the name of

(*a*) Gen. xvii. 7.    (*b*) 2 John ver. 4.    (*c*) Psal. xcii. 1, 3.

(*d*) Psal. cxxviii. 3.

(*e*) 2 Pet. i. 4.

Israel, his people (a). With what sweet tranquillity may you look forward to all the uncertainties of life and death, for yourselves and for your children, while you have such a joyful persuasion, that you leave them in the hand of your father, and of their father, of your God, and of their God (b)!

And give me leave, on so natural an occasion, to address myself to you, my dear friends, from whom the great sovereign of life has been pleased to take away pious and promising children, by (what we are apt erroneously to call) an immature death. You are ready to say, with a peculiar accent, that you are the persons who have seen affliction (c). The images of those lovely creatures rise in your memory on such a hint as this, and crowd into your minds afresh. You saw them growing up, and flourishing under your care; growing up, perhaps, to ripeness of years, and flourishing in some remarkable degrees of knowledge and of grace. And you fondly promised yourselves, from what you saw in them, that they would not only have been the comfort and delight of your declining, broken, age, but the support and honour of the church, when you were here no more: and now all these pleasing prospects are vanished, all these important hopes are buried with their dear dust.

Nay, perhaps, God hath, in this respect, broken you with breach upon breach (d), has taken away one desirable branch of your family after another, till all the branches are lopped off,

(a) Isa. xliv.

(b) John xx. 17.

(c) Lam. iii. 1.

(d) Job xvi. 14.



and you stand, like the naked trunks of trees which were once diffusing a thick and extensive shade. Yes, I am aware, there are some of you, that know the peculiar agony, (to all but such as yourselves probably unknown,) of following your last child to the grave. I fear, I come too near you, and that some of your wounds are bleeding anew. Would the balm of sympathetic tears administer any relief to them, how easy would it be to pour it out in abundance ! but, in a case like yours, there is a much more efficacious and sovereign relief.

I am speaking to christians. You sometimes plead the indications of wisdom and piety which, you discerned in your children as an aggravation of your sorrow for the loss of them ; and I acknowledge in one view, they are indeed so : but in another view, how greatly do they extenuate it !

You saw them, it may be, when they were under a languishing distemper, for some time, as it were, daily dying before your eyes ; but did you not likewise see the divine rod and staff comforting them (a) ? It may be, sometimes to such a degree, that you regretted not so much, that they were going off the stage, as that you were not accompanying them in the same way, and with the same spirit. You heard their expiring groans, but did you not also hear some songs of praise mingled with them ? perhaps, you heard them strengthening their feeble voices, and summoning up all their little remainder of spirits, to say, as from their very soul, my flesh

and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever (a).\* And does the recollection afford you no pleasure? or does your pleasure terminate even here?

Your dear children are now dead to you; but do you not believe, that they live to God (b), and live with him? What if they had been still continued on earth, answering all your schemes, and possessing all that you intended or desired for them? How low had those services been, and how worthless those possessions, in comparison to the services which they now render, with the riches and glory which they now inherit!

Methinks it should be, and surely christians, it sometimes is, matter of rejoicing to you, to reflect, that the desolation of your houses is, in some degree, the prosperity and joy of that celestial society, to which you are more intimately allied, than to any thing here; to think, that your families should have been nurseries for heaven, and that God should have honoured you so far, as already to have taken some of your children to minister around the throne of his glory, and so to be the associates of angels in their highest honour and joy.

And is it not most delightful to think of meeting them again? Had they still survived, the

(a) Psalm lxxiii. 26.

\* Some, into whose hands these discourses will probably fall, know that these were not imaginary circumstances; and cannot but remember, they have since attended the death of some of those young persons to whom this sermon was first preached.

(b) Luke xx. 38,

thoughts of leaving them might have sharpened the pangs of dissolving nature, which now the remembrance of them may moderate. You had left them in an ensnaring, calamitous world; perhaps, some of you had left them in circumstances of difficulty and distress. But now all those apprehensions are over; and what could otherwise have been the stroke of painful separation, will now be the means of ending your separation, and bringing you once for all, to the embrace of each other. And oh, with what mutual congratulations will the converse be renewed; with what delightful overflowings of parental complacency on the one side, and of filial gratitude on the other! how thankfully will they for ever acknowledge our pious cares and early instructions, to which perhaps, under God, they owe their first religious impressions, and, in some sense, even their present glories! and in the great day of the Lord, with what unutterable transports of holy joy will you stand forth, and say at once, in the most literal and the most sublime sense, Here are We, and the children that our God hath graciously given us (a)!

Surely, when you think of these things, your joys may abundantly counter-balance your sorrows: and I appeal to your own hearts, even in the midst of all this tender distress, whether such a circumstance as yours, supposing it ever so aggravated, be not much more tolerable, than that, which we have been describing; of a pious parent bewailing the death of a wicked

child, or even looking upon him in life and health under the tyranny of satan, and of sin, and in the probable way to everlasting misery.

And thus I have finished my meditation on this pathetic and important subject. Let me conclude with my most affectionate prayers to the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of mercies (a), for all of you to whom the discourse has been addressed.

May young ones be brought by the blessed spirit of God, to know, in this their day, the things that belong to their eternal peace (b); that they may apply to Christ for life and salvation, and join themselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant (c)! there all our applications to you centre; there may all your attendance on our ministrations issue!

May those, who have been effectually taught this lesson, who are the joy of parents and ministers, and the hopes of the church, as to the rising age, be very deeply sensible of the distinguishing grace of God to them! may they be spared to rise up in the stead of their parents! and may they labour with great success, to spread a spirit of seriousness amongst their companions, and to maintain it continually in their own souls!

May the pious parents of pious children be suitably affected with the goodness of God to them and theirs! and may the parents of others be stirred up, as they value the souls of their children, and their own comfort and repose, to

(a) 2 Cor. i. 3. (b) Luke xix. 42. (c) Jer. l. 5.

renew those attempts which have hitherto proved unsuccessful, and to exert the most vigorous efforts, for plucking the unhappy creatures, as brands out of the burning (a)!

In a word, may divine grace so co-operate with all, that all of you, according to your different relations and characters, may have reason to bless God for those awful thoughts which I have now been laying before you; that such cutting reflections, as I have so largely described under the former heads, may never be known by one parent or one child in the assembly, otherwise than by description, by imagination, by reason and by faith! never may they be known by heart-rending, and overwhelming experience! on the contrary, may parents and children be mutually growing joys and comforts to each other, in life, and in death, at your appearance before the solemn tribunal of Christ, and throughout all the ages of a glorious eternity! AMEN.

(a) Amos iv. 11.

(a) Zech. iii. 2.



## SERMON VII.

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*Youth reminded of approaching Judgment.*

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*ECCLES. xi. 9.*

*Rejoice, O young man in thy youth, and let thine heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth; and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thy eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.*

**M**Y dear young friends! if it were possible for me, while I am speaking, to lay open my whole heart before you, in such a manner as that you should be witnesses to every secret sentiment of it with regard to you, I should do it with a great deal of pleasure. You would see a tenderer concern for your present and everlasting welfare than words can express, and a proportionable desire of approving myself your faithful servant for Jesus' sake (a.) I know not, how far you may have considered what I have largely laid before you, concerning the

[a] 2 Cor. iv. 5.

importance of the rising generation \* ; but I am so thoroughly convinced of this importance, and so impressed with the conviction of it, that there is no part of my public work, to which I arise with a greater solicitude about the success, than I feel when I am thus particularly applying myself to you ; and there is no prayers which I offer to God with greater earnestness, than that I may have the joy to see you walking in the truth (a), a seed to serve the Lord, which shall be accounted to him for a generation (b).

This is what I wish, and pray, with regard to all of you. It is with inexpressible pleasure that I see so evidently, as to many, that my prayers and my labours are not in vain. Many of you are my joy now, and I trust through divine grace, will be my crown, in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at his coming (c). But would to God, there were none of whom I had occasion to say, I stand in doubt of you (d) ! would to God, I could see that spirit of serious piety universally prevailing amongst you, which, wherever it doth prevail in young ones, is such a token of good to themselves, to their friends, and to the church of Christ !

Where it is otherwise, I look upon you with compassion and sorrow ; but blessed be God, not with despair. I am not without hope, that God hath purposes of love and grace to serve on many of you ; especially those, who have been the hearers of so many good instructions, and so many prayers, as I have reason to believe

\* Sermon I. (a) 3 John ver. 4. (b) Psal. xxii. 30.

(b) 1 Theff. ii. 19. (d) Gal. iv. 20.

many of you are ; and who can tell, but this is the day, and this the ordinance, in which these gracious purposes are to take place ?

I know that the first step to your safety is a sense of your danger. We live in a world so full of snares, that the righteous scarcely are saved (*a*) ; and yet I fear, some of you have very little apprehension of this danger, very little concern about the whole armour of God (*b*), so necessary to preserve you from it. And therefore, not to give you any vain and groundless alarm, but to produce, if possible, that holy caution and solicitude of soul, which may be the happy means of your security and preservation, I am now setting myself to discourse on some of the most awful words, which are any where in the whole book of God, addressed to persons of your age. I hope you will listen to them, and that God will make them as a kind of solemn trumpet, whereby those that are spiritually dead may be awakened ; so awakened, as that the other trumpet to which they refer, and which will surely awaken your sleeping dust, may be heard not with sorrow, but with delight.

It is observable that Solomon had a great regard to young people in his writings ; and it is an evidence of his wisdom that he had so, for youth is the age of discipline. He therefore gives them line upon line, and precept upon precept. Sometimes he soothes, and sometimes he rebukes ; sometimes he beseeches them with paternal tenderness, and sometimes persuades

(*a*) 1 Pet. iv. 28. . . . . (*b*) Eph. vi. 12.

them, as knowing the terrors of the Lord (a); and saves them as with fear, plucking them out of the fire (b). And this he doth in the words I have now been reading; Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thine heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth; and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes. But know thou, that for all these things, God will bring thee into judgment.

It will be my business—to explain, and—to inforce the caution, and then—to conclude with some reflections upon it. May the plain, but awful things I am to deliver, be, as the words of the wise are, like goads, to pierce and rouse your minds, and like nails fastened in a sure place by the skilful master of assemblies (c), which being given out from the one great shepherd, are succeeded by his grace, and improved to his glory!

I. I am to explain the words I have been reading.

And, in order to fix the sense of them, I shall only observe, that some understand them, as intimating Solomon's readiness to allow young people in the innocent pleasures and gaieties of life; whilst others interpret the whole as a solemn and a lively warning of the great danger they were in, of running into the most fatal excess. I shall in a few words give you my reasons, both why I mention the former, and why I prefer the latter of these senses.

1. Some understand these words, as an inti-

(a) 2 Cor. v. 11.

(b) Jude ver. 23.

(c) Eccles xii. 11. Isa. xxii, 23.

mation of Solomon's readiness to indulge young people in all the innocent entertainments of life.

They paraphrase the words in a soft and easy manner as if he had said, "Do not imagine, " Oh young man that I give thee lessons of morality and piety in a gloomy humour, or with " any rigorous and unkind design. Far from " desiring to lay thee under any unnecessary restraint, I rather exhort thee to rejoice " in the days of thy youth, those best days, in " which the spirits are brisk and lively, and all " the powers of nature in their most vigorous " state. Let thine heart then cheer thee: Wear " an habitual smile upon thy countenance, and " indulge that gaiety which is so natural to " the spring-season of life; so natural, and indeed so decent. Walk in the ways of thine " heart, and in the sight of thine eyes. Seek " out every innocent object of amusement: " gratify thy genius, thy temper, thy relish, in " all the particularities of it; provided only " that thou dost still remember thy future account, acknowledging God in thy ways, and " guarding against every abuse of his goodness, " every thing that would on the whole be offensive to him, and detrimental to thyself."

My Brethren, I readily own that there is nothing in this paraphrase of the words which is unbecoming the piety and wisdom of the author and that he has in effect said in the same several passages of this very book. There is hardly a sentiment which he more frequently repeats than this. There is nothing, says he, in express words, a-



gain and again, there is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of his labour (a). It is good and comely for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun; for it is his portion, and a heart to rejoice in it is the gift of God (b). Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart: let thy garments be always white and thine head lack no ointment (c). And once more; I recommend mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat and drink, and to be merry (d). The sense of which, if we would find a sense worthy of the author, must no doubt be this, "that religion is far from forbidding a cheerful use of the enjoyments of life; and that without such a use they are given to the possessor in vain;" who indeed can otherwise hardly be called the possessor, but rather the steward and purveyor for the next heir, who may perhaps be as profuse, as his predecessor was pernicious and insatiable.

And I hope you will not imagine, that in what I have farther to say, I intend any thing inconsistent with these observations and advices. To be devout, and to be melancholy, are two very different things; and the greatest enemies of religion could not call it by a more invidious and unjust name, than a walking mournfully before the Lord of hosts (e). Instead therefore of dissuading you from a life of true pleasure, I

(a) Eccles. ii. 24, iii. 12, 13, 22. (b) chap. v. 18, 19.

(c) Eccles. ix. 7, 8. (d) chap. viii. 15. (e) Mal. iii. 14.

would rather direct you to it, and only urge you to despise that which is visionary and mean, to secure that which is solid and noble ; in a word, to decline no delights which will not interfere with others much more valuable, none which will not be mingled with regret, or followed by a lasting anguish, a thousand times more than an equivalent for them. And so far as these precautions will admit. I will venture to say, even in this sense, Rejoice O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth. Nevertheless I am well persuaded this is not, and cannot be, the original sense of the words ; and therefore add,

2. They are rather to be understood, as an awful and lively caution to young persons, to be upon their guard against those gratifications whereby conscience might be wounded and God dishonoured.

I suppose, with the general stream of commentators, that the words are an ironical way of expressing, in a more pointed and lively manner, the very contrary to what they seem literally to speak ; like that speech of Elijah concerning Baal, when he said, Cry aloud, for he is a God (*a*) ; or that of Micaiah to Ahab, Go up to Ramoth-Gilead, and prosper, (*b*) ; or that of our Lord to his disciples, Sleep on now and take your rest (*c*) : to which, I suppose, we may add that saying of God concerning Adam after his fall, Behold the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil (*d*). Thus do these

(*a*) 1 Kings xviii. 27.

(*b*) 1 Kings xxii. 15]

(*c*) Mat. xxvi. 45.

(*d*) Gen. iii. 22.

words most strongly forbid what they seem to allow, and are as if he had said, "Thou poor  
"thoughtless creature, who in this giddy intoxication of youth, art so madly bent upon  
"sensual pleasure, take thy fill of it, and withhold not thine heart from any joy. Follow  
"all the most impetuous appetites of nature, and  
"wantonly bound over every restraint of reason and piety, trample on the admonition of  
"all thy teachers, shake off the fetters of a strict  
"education, and burst the bonds of religion,  
"like threads of flax when they are touched  
"by the flame. But think not, Oh sinner, that  
"thou shalt always carry it off with that  
"haughty triumph; know, that as thou hast  
"thy day, God will also have his: a day of strict  
"account and of ample recompence. Know  
"that for all these things, God will bring thee  
"into judgment; and if thou canst find out no  
"expedient, to conceal thee from an all-seeing  
"eye, or to defend thee from an omnipotent  
"hand, a deluge of wrath will bear thee away  
"to everlasting destruction. Dearly shalt thou  
"then pay for every present indulgence, and  
"every sweet morsel shall then be turned bitter, and be as the gall of asps within thee."

This I say, appears to be the evident meaning of these words. And that for this plain reason; that some of the phrases made use of, are such as are never taken in a good sense, and therefore cannot admit the former interpretation. Solomon doth indeed, as you have heard, exhort his readers to eat and drink, and enjoy the good of their labours; but where can you find him,

or any other sacred writer, exhorting or allowing men to walk in the way of their heart, and in the sight of their eyes? I am sure that phrase generally signifies an indulgence to the irregularities of appetite and passion, in the neglect of reason and of scripture. Thus the Israelites are charged to wear fringes on their garments (*a*), that they might remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them; and might not seek after their own heart, and their own eyes; that is (as it follows,) that they might not go a whoring from God after those gay and luxurious idolatries, which regaled the senses, while they debauched the soul. And thus the wicked Israelite, whom God would separate to evil out of all the tribes, is represented as vainly and arrogantly saying (*b*), I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart; that is, (as it follows,) to add drunkenness to thirst, or one riot to another. And once more; to judge after the sight of the eyes (*c*), is a proverbial expression, to signify partial and corrupt judgment. We have no reason therefore to imagine, that Solomon would vary the signification of a phrase already so expressly fixed in some of the sacred writings, which he was himself obliged not only to read, but to transcribe (*d*), as he undoubtedly did on his accession to the throne; where he had also read it again and again, that the imagination of man's heart is only evil from his youth (*e*); and he had himself elsewhere said, that foolishness is so closely

(*a*) Numb. xv. 29. (*b*) Deut. xxix. 19. (*c*) Isa. xi. 3.

(*d*) Deut. xvii. 18, 19. (*e*) Gen. vi. 5. viii. 21.

bound up in the heart of a Child, that not only words of admonition, but the rod of correction is necessary to drive it away (*a*). To these general remarks on the usual signification of the phrases occurring here we may also farther add, that the connection of these words would lead us to understand them as an ironical rather than a serious concession, since they conclude with what seems a very awful menace. But know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment: as he should have said, "Assure thyself, thou must answer for all." Which sense is farther illustrated by what follows in the last verse of this, and the first of the next chapter, [which are very unhappily divided from each other, as several other passages are, which have indeed a very close and necessary connection;] Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, (i. e. the regret which would follow these sensual indulgences, if thou walk in the way of it), and put away evil from thy flesh, (i. e. those carnal pleasures which religion forbids, or those punishments they would certainly draw down upon thee); for childhood and youth are vanity; and remember now thy creator in the days of thy youth (*b*) instead of sacrificing them to vanity and folly. You easily see there is a beautiful and lively opposition between the several parts of the period on this interpretation, which on the other must be much injured, if not entirely destroyed.

I would farther observe, that the judgment, to which Solomon here refers, must undoubtedly

(*a*) Prov. xxii. 15.

(*b*) Eccles. xi. 10. xii. 1.



ly be that of a future state; since he had expressly asserted above, that here all things come alike to all; and no man knoweth either love or hatred, (i. e. the favour or displeasure of the Divine Being), by all that is before them (*a*). That there is a wicked man to whom it happeneth according to the event of the righteous; and, on the other hand, many a righteous man to whom it happeneth according to the event of the wicked (*b*), i. e. that very bad men often prolong their lives through a long series of prosperity, while good men are cut off by an untimely stroke, or linger out their days in a painful succession of sorrows. This led him to conclude, Surely God will judge the righteous and the wicked (*c*); which in many of these cases could only be done in some invisible state to which both should be reserved. And of this judgment he solemnly warns the young sinner, as a most powerful antidote against the baits of sensuality; as an awful thought which might fix the most roving eye, and be a means of reducing the most ungoverned heart to the discipline of wisdom and piety.

As I conclude that this sense of the words is now sufficiently illustrated and established, I proceed.

II. To enforce the admonition by such considerations, as are expressly suggested in the text, or may naturally arise from it.

I importunately beg your serious attention; for I say not these things, either to grieve, or to shame

(*a*) Eccles. ix. 1, 2.

(*b*) chap. viii. 14, vii. 15.

(*c*) chap. iii. 17.

you, but as my beloved brethren and children, I warn you (a). And here let me prevail upon you, to consider, the depravation and corruption of your own hearts, the many delusive charms which are continually offering themselves to your eyes:—Consider that the blessed God is now the spectator of your conduct, that he will certainly bring you to an account for it, an account which will be inexpressibly strict and awful. These are the arguments, which I shall more largely enforce; and if they make no deep impression on your mind, there is the utmost reason to fear, that you will go on hardened in your evil ways, till you actually come to that tribunal which you now forget or despise.

1. Think of the depravation and corruption of your own hearts, to deter you from walking in the ways of them.

The heart of man is described by that God, who alone perfectly knows it, as deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked (b). The imagination of it is, by him said to be only evil, and that continually (c.) It is a very sad truth, though perhaps you have never seriously considered it, that a degenerate and corrupted nature is conveyed down from one generation of men to another, so as still to leave room—for that expostulation of Job, What is man that he should be pure, and how can he be clean that is born

(a) 1 Cor. iv. 14.

(b) Jer. xvii. 9.

(c) Gen. vi. 5.

of a woman (*a*)!—for that confession of David, Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me (*b*)! for that declaration of the Apostle, whether in his own name, or that of another, in me, that is, in my flesh there dwelleth no good thing (*c*). If you know not the plague of your own heart (*d*), it is a plain argument that you know little of God, or of yourselves; and you had need be seriously reminded of it, lest with Solomon's fool, you should trust it (*e*), and the blind lead the blind, till you fall into the pit of destruction (*f*).

Do you not know the degeneracy and corruption of your own hearts? I beseech you to review what has passed there: think of the advantages which you have enjoyed for knowing and serving God; of all the mercies you have received, of all the instructions you have heard, of all the convictions you have sometimes felt, and of all the good resolutions you have probably formed in consequence of them. And then think, how little all this hath produced, how you have forgotten God, days and times without number (*g*), and started back from him like a deceitful bow (*h*); how you have been delivered over, in a foolish circle, from one vanity to another, wearied with the pursuit of trifles, and yet rising, after a little respite, to pursue them again. Think, my friends, how you have overborne the dictates of your

(*a*) Job xv. 14, xxv. 4. (*b*) Psal. ii. 5. (*c*) Rom. vii. 18.  
 (*d*) 1 Kings viii. 38. (*e*) Prov. xxviii. 26. (*f*) Mat. xv. 14.  
 (*g*) Jer. ii. 32. (*h*) Psal. lxxviii. 57.

own consciences, and grieved the Holy Spirit of God, when he hath been pleading with you in a most importunate manner, and saying unto you, Oh do not this abominable thing that I hate (a). Yet you have done it, and sacrificed the repose of your own minds, and the hopes of glory, to mean, vile considerations, which you would be ashamed to hear mentioned before an assembly. And this not in one instance, but again and again. You have formed good purposes, and broken them? and formed them again, and broken them again; and run such a round of folly and sin, that I am persuaded many of you could not have suspected yourselves of such a conduct some time ago, nor have believed, if one had told you, that you should act such a part. And must these treacherous hearts still be trusted, and will you still go on to walk in the ways of them; when they have already led you into so much sin, when they have already plunged you into so much distress?

2. Think how many delusive charms are daily offering themselves to your eyes, that you may not heedlessly walk in the sight of them.

Remember, Sirs, I beseech you, that you are in a very dangerous situation, and walk among snares. The most mortal poisons are often mingled with the sweetest dainties, and the most dangerous enemies of our souls accost us in the fairest forms. The fruit which undid our common mother, and brought death and a curse up-

on us all, was a fruit which appeared to be good for food, and which she saw to be pleasant to the eyes (*a*).

It is an awakening saying of one of the most lively and pathetic, as well as of the most pious writers which our age has produced \*. “That  
“ the condition of man in his natural state seems  
“ to be like that of a person sick of a variety of  
“ diseases, knowing neither his distemper nor  
“ cure, but unhappily inclosed in a place where  
“ he could hear, or see, or taste, or feel nothing,  
“ but what tended to inflame his disorder.”

Not that the world in its original constitution, and considered as the work of God, is by any means to be blamed. The whole system of it is such, as would lead a regular mind to wise and pious reflections; and its most pleasurable scenes would be the natural occasion of exciting correspondent gratitude and devotion to the great author of every good and perfect gift (*b*). But our souls being corrupted, those things become dangerous to us, which might otherwise have been innocent, and even beneficial; as some of the most wholesome and nourishing foods are fatal to a person inflamed with a raging fever.

I am persuaded, that nothing is so like to make us truly wise, as observations on fact: let me therefore beseech you, my young friends, seriously to consider how many, within the compass of your own knowledge, have been ruined by the blandishments of the senses; and, perhaps, some of them persons in other respects, of no contemptible characters. We may indeed

(*a*) Gen. iii. 6. \* Law on Christian Perfection, page 11.

(*b*) James i. 17.



say of the world, that specious harlot, She hath cast down many wounded, and many strong men have been slain by her (*a*). Do not, therefore, walk in the sight of your eyes, lest you also be like the bird, that, struck with some gay promising appearance, hasteneth eagerly to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life (*b*). But endeavour to open the eye of the mind, and by faith to behold the great realities of the invisible world, that you may govern your lives with a regard to them, and so secure, not the deceitful forms, but the substance, of true happiness.

3. Let me seriously remind you, that the blessed God is the spectator of all your conduct.

This is strongly implied, though it be not expressed in the text: for all these things God will bring thee into judgment; and you cannot surely imagine, that he is like earthly judges, who must have recourse to witnesses, to inform them of what they would otherwise be ignorant of. He is not, he cannot be, far from any one of us, seeing in him we live, and move, and have our being (*c*). Nor can we be concealed from his eye, should we fly on the wings of the morning, and with the swiftness of light, to the uttermost ends of the earth: for his hand must lead us thither, and his right hand support us there (*d*). Remember this, my friends, he sees you when you overlook him, sees himself neglected by you, and his laws violated, and his

(*a*) Prov. vii. 26.

(*b*) Prov. vii. 23.

(*c*) Acts xvii. 27, 28.

(*d*) Psal. cxxxix. 9, 10.

grace despised ; And all for what ? ' You have reason to blush and be confounded, when you think of that : for every vanity that offers itself to your pursuit, for trifles lighter than air, for which you would not violate the common rules of decency to a fellow-creature. As if it were to be taken for granted, that his favour is a thing of no consequence, or that nothing can forfeit it. Oh Sirs, he hears me while I am speaking to you; and sees perhaps, that some of you hardly give me an attentive hearing. He observes, how many admonitions are despised by you, how many convictions are overborne, how many vows are broken, how many vain words are spoken to him in those formalities which you call your devotions; and, perhaps, with regard to some of you, I may add, how many bold words are spoken against him, when those mouths are set against the heavens, whose tongues have walked through the earth (*a*). All those slights of religion, which (for want of understanding) you may be ready to call wit; all that licentious contempt which you throw on his sacred word and ordinances, and fancy it is freedom of thought. You may go on, and presume upon it, that your lips are your own (*b*); but I must tell you, that the Lord hearkens and hears, and a book of remembrance (*c*) is written for you likewise ;—a book, which will another day be thrown open, and read to you with a voice of vengeance and terror ; which leads me to urge you.

(*a*) Psa. lxxiii. 9.

(*b*) Psa. xii. 4.

(*c*) Mal. iii. 16.

4. To think how certain the judgment of God is, and your own personal appearance before him.

You know, there is not any doctrine of the gospel more plain and evident than this, that every one of us must give an account of himself to God (*a*); and indeed it was a doctrine of the Jewish revelation, and even of the wiser heathens: but I would desire you particularly to observe, how strongly it is expressed in the words of the text, Know thou, that God will bring thee into judgment! Thee, O young man, thee, O child, whoever thou art that hearest me this day, to thee is the word of this admonition sent, God will bring thee into judgment: His trumpet will sound, his tribunal will be set; thou wilt be summoned, and thou must obey. In vain will be every attempt to conceal thyself, or to excuse or dispute an immediate attendance. He will bring thee; his hand will be strong upon thee (*b*), infinitely too strong for thy feeble resistance. And therefore the assembly of the whole world before him is beautifully described, by driving together a flock of sheep or of goats (*c*). Bear witness, Oh sinner, and let thy conscience record it; I warn thee of this solemn, this dreadful day. I tell thee, that as surely as thou art now in the house of God, thou shalt then be standing before his bar. And how will you stand? Look you to that. We are to give the warning, and knowing the terrors of the Lord, are to persuade men (*d*). Hear now there-

(*a*) Rom, xiv. 12.

(*b*) Ezek. iii. 14.

(*c*) Mat. xxv. 32.

(*d*) 2 Cor. v. 11.

fore this admonition for yourselves, and know is for your good (*a*). Consider this, ye that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver (*b*). And to increase the weight and efficacy of the thought, reflect, once more,

5. How strict and awful this Judgment will be. For all these things God will bring thee into judgment ; which naturally implies, that it will be particular and final.

Every particular will be reviewed. All these things ; or as it is yet more strongly expressed elsewhere, every work, and every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil (*c*). He hath sworn by himself, that he will not forget any of thy works (*d*) Poor thoughtless creatures ! you sometimes conceal your irregularities from parents and masters, or others to whom you are accountable ; you disguise them in so artful a manner, or form such excuses for them as may impose upon men ; and you value yourselves on the dexterity with which you do it. But be not deceived, God cannot be thus mocked (*e*). For all these things, and a thousand times more than you can remember ; actions and words, and thoughts of vanity, which passed with you unobserved in the crowd, or, if at all observed, were forgotten in a moment ; for all these, will he reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes (*f*), i. e. He will marshall them in dreadful array, as a host of enemies armed for thy destruction. Have you never seen a criminal at the bar, how he is confound-

(*a*) Job v. 27.      (*b*) Psal. l. 22.      (*c*) Eccles xii. 14.

(*d*) Amos viii. 7.      (*e*) Gal. vi. 7.      (*f*) Psal. l. 21.

ed, when the force of evidence bears him down, and the sagacity of a judge detects the idle, foolish pleas, with which he flattered himself before his trial, and imagined he should easily come off with impunity? Then did you see an emblem of yourselves, and your own state; thus will you, if you go on in your sins, be entangled and silenced, and ashamed and condemned. All your crimes will be produced, in all their circumstances of aggravation. Nor will God forget this present admonition and expostulation, though you may forget it, or though you should remember it only in scorn, and wonder what occasion there is for all this earnestness and importunity. You may if you please, make a jest of divine judgment; but you will find it dreadfully serious. Nothing so easy, as to despise it; but oh sinner, nothing so hard, as to endure it: for I add,

It will be a final doom, and your eternal state will be fixed by it. It is no light crime of which you will then be convicted, no less than wilful, obstinate, incorrigible rebellion against the majesty of heaven, against the God of your lives, and the father of all your mercies; and it will be no light punishment to which you will be consigned, for following the way of your heart, and the sight of your eyes, in opposition to all the authority of his law, and all the methods of his recovering grace.

Read over the sentence, as recorded from the lips of him by whom it is to be pronounced. There is but one for those on the left hand, and hearken to it: depart from me, ye cursed:—



sinner, thou must be separated from God. But that perhaps you can bear; it is but calling him by some bold name: it is but dressing him up in your imagination under some false odious character, and you may perhaps think it is best to be at a distance from him. Wretched creature! But thou must depart as accursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels (*a*). And canst thou reconcile thy mind to that? to dwell for ever in darkness and horror, in such a scene, and with such associates! to have nothing to entertain the eye, nothing to cheer the heart, nothing to divert painful reflection, nothing to allay the most cutting remorse; to see every pleasurable object, for which you forgot God, and sold yourselves to destruction, removed to an eternal distance; to feel all the irregular passions of your own hearts let loose at once, like so many hungry vultures to pray insatiably upon them; and hope, the last of supports under the last of evils, shut out for ever!—oh sirs, this is the result of the judgment of God. Lo, this is the portion of the wicked, and this the heritage appointed to him by God (*b*). It is a grief to a tender heart to think of it, to hear the very report. Oh what will it be to you to meet it and feel it, in all its force and all its terror! can your heart endure, or can your hands be strong, in the day, that God shall deal with you (*c*)?

Alas, my heart is pained for you, and my

(*a*) Mat. xxv. 41.

(*b*) Job xx. 29.

(*c*) Ezek. xxii. 14.

bowels yearn over you ! methinks I see all the haughtiness of your spirits broken, see you pale and trembling on the very brink of that pit, from whence there is no redemption, and into which the flaming sword of divine justice is driving you. And can nothing be done to save you ? Alas, what should be done ? Can any rescue you from the hand of Omnipotence ? can any intercede for you with that then inexorable judge ? It cannot be. But he is not yet inexorable. He has not yet laid aside the character of a Saviour, of a compassionate friend to perishing creatures. And I present these things to persuade you, if possible, in this your day, to know the things that belong to your peace, before they be for ever hid from your eyes (a). May divine grace effectually do it ; and teach you so to judge yourselves, that you may not then be condemned of the Lord (b) ! and now,

III. It only remains, that I conclude the discourse with some plain inferences from it. And here,

1. The young sinner has surely a great deal of reason to be thankful, that he hath not already been brought into judgment.

You have indeed the greatest cause to say, it is of the Lord's mercy, that you, are not consumed (c), your breath is in your nostrils (d) ; and perhaps you can recollect times and circumstances, in which it seemed just ready to

(a) Luke xix. 42.

(b) 1 Cor. xi. 31, 32.

(c) Lam. iii. 22.

(d) Isa. ii. 22.

ake its flight, when you appeared to be in the extremest danger, so that there was but a step between you and death (a). And what if that little interval had been passed! where had you then been? how low had you then fallen? Why it is most certain, as to some of you, that had you been thus cut off, the torrent had swept you away into eternal ruin. Even now, while we are worshipping God in his house, rejoicing in mercy and in hope, your miserable spirits had been in the regions of the damned, feeling more than mortal language can express, and fearing yet more, much more than you felt; being, like the apostate angels, reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day (b). Adore the divine patience and forbearance, that your case is so different; for most happily different it is. I have the pleasure to testify to you this day, in the midst of all these terrible things which faithfulness to your souls extorts from me, that the Lord waiteth that he may be gracious, and does, as it were raise himself up that he may have mercy upon you (c): he rises from his throne to stretch out the golden sceptre to you, to open his compassionate arms to embrace you, if you approach him as humble penitents. Jesus the judge will become your friend; he will receive you, he will shelter you and bless you: if, with believing hearts you seek his mercy, after having so long dared his vengeance. This day do I testify, that he is ready to bestow upon

(a) 1 Sam. xx. 3.

(b) Jude ver. 6.

(c) Isa. xxx. 18.

you far more valuable pleasures than those which he calls you to resign, and to give you much greater satisfaction in contradicting the corruptions of your heart, and controlling the impulse of your senses than you ever have found, or could possibly find, in gratifying them. May you be persuaded to the wise and happy exchange! then will the patience of God be salvation to you, when his goodness leads you to repentance.

2. The young christian hath apparent reason to be thankful for that grace, which hath sanctified his heart, and turned away his eyes from beholding vanity.

My brethren in the Lord! permit me to remind you, that you were sometimes foolish and disobedient, serving divers lusts and pleasures (a)! but there is now room for us to congratulate you, and say, blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear, (b). You now know your true interest; the fear of the Lord is implanted in your heart, and your eyes are directed heavenwards. You are experimentally acquainted with the pleasure which religion brings, and see that you have exchanged your tinsel for gold; your shadows for the most valuable substance; the momentary blaze and crackling of thorns (c), for the steady light, and influence, and glory of the sun, which is shining more and more till the perfect day (d).

Let me invite you to the most cheerful ac-

(a) Tit. iii. 3. (b) Mat. xiii. 16. (c) Eccles. vii. 6. (d) Prov. iv. 18.

knowledgments of the riches of divine grace to you. Bless God for the new nature he hath given you, for that heart of flesh (a) into which the rock is transformed by a new-creating power; for those new hopes which he hath opened upon you. Bless him, that you are now sheltered from the storms of divine wrath, and that, instead of looking forward to the judgment day, with the horrors of a malefactor, who is then to be condemned and executed, you are rather lifting up your heads to meet the prospect with triumph, as knowing that your complete salvation will then be manifested, and your redemption be perfected (b).

3. We may farther infer, from what we have now been hearing, that the gospel of the blessed Jesus gives us very great advantages for reclaiming young persons from the snares of sensuality and ruin.

The text abundantly intimates the importance of those considerations, which are taken from the final judgment. Now it is certain, the gospel discovers this in the strongest light. Therein is the wrath of God revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (c); and some more awful views of judgment are given, than even the language of the prophets, emphatical as it is, can furnish out. In the gospel, we are not only told in general, that God will judge the world in righteousness, but particularly assured, that he will do it by that man whom he hath appointed (d), even the Lord Je-

(a) Ezek. xxxvi. 26.

(b) Luke xxi. 28.

(c) Rom. i. 18.

(d) Acts xvii. 11.



sus Christ, who for that purpose shall descend from heaven, in his own glory, and the glory of the father, and all the holy angels with him (a); that the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised (b); that small and great shall stand before God (c); while in the mean time the world is in flames around them, the sun being darkened, and the moon not giving her light (d), the stars falling (e), the heavens passing away with a great noise, the elements melting with fervent heat, the earth with all things in it being burnt up (f), and departing out of its place (g). And can any thing be more awakening and awful than all this pomp of horror, this conflagration and confusion of nature? Yes, sirs, there is one thing yet more awakening; and it is that which the gospel expressly pronounces, that, in consequence of all, the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal (h). ETERNITY, eternity, my brethren is the declaration of the gospel. Nature might lead us to suspect it, the law might give some intimation of it, but the gospel alone asserts it; and not only asserts it, but describes it too. It lends to our faith that perspective by which we descry the paradise of God, and it lays hell open before us, so that destruction hath no covering (i). The christian preacher may then say it, with an energy beyond what Solomon could conceive, merely on the principles of the Jewish revelation, Rejoice, oh young man, in thy youth, &c. but know thou, that

(a) Mat. xvi. 27, xxv. 21. (b) 1 Cor. xv. 52. (c) Rev. xx. 12. (d) Mark xiii. 24. (e) Mat. xxiv. 29. (f) 2 Pet. iii. 10. (g) Rev. xx. 11, (h) Mat. xxv. 46. (i) Job. xxvi 6.

for all these things, God will bring thee into judgment.

Nor must I by any means omit that grand advantage which the gospel gives us in these addresses, by the discovery of the blessed Jesus under the character of a Saviour. It displays him as the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely; as inviting, as waiting, as pleading, as weeping over sinners, yea, as bleeding and dying for them: as describing the terrors of judgment, that he may awaken them to flee from it, and may gather them, as a hen gathers her chickens under its compassionate protecting wings (*a*). But is this a simile that we may use when speaking of him who is to appear under the character of "the worthy judge eternal?" Yes, my friends, low as it may seem, it is a simile that he himself uses, and perhaps uses it in part; it is so low, that the language itself may be a specimen of that condescension which it is intended to express.

Such is that wonderful contrast of what is most awful, and most engaging, in the gospel; and this gospel, sirs, do you daily hear. To you is the word of this salvation sent (*b*); to you is the whole counsel of God declared. May you never be left to reject it against yourselves, (*c*) but may divine grace render it a saviour of life unto life (*d*)! once more;

4. We may farther infer, that the serious thoughts of death must be very useful to young persons, since judgment is so nearly connected with it. It is appointed unto all men once to die, and

(*a*) Mat. xxiii. 37. (*b*) Acts xiii. 26. (*c*) Luke vii. 30

(*d*) 2 Cor. ii. 16.

after death the judgment (a): and though the final solemnity of that judgment may be delayed to distant ages, the state of the soul is in a moment unalterably fixed; and in this sense, as the tree falls, so it must lie (b) for there is no device, nor working in the grave (c).

Now as this is generally acknowledged, we may naturally conclude, that those, who remember death, will not forget judgment. Let me therefore, my young friends, call down your thoughts to the grave; and methinks among so many monuments of mortality, it should not be difficult to do it.

Recollect, I beseech you, what of that kind you have seen the year past. How many of you have attended the funerals of youth like yourselves, of children much younger than yourselves! they have given up the ghost and where are they (d)? What a change hath death made! —where are they? Why, perhaps what remains of them, within the walls of this place, under the feet of some of you. Could your eye penetrate a few feet of earth, you would see them; but oh, what spectacles of horror would you discover! yet perhaps a year ago they were in the number of the most amiable objects of your sight. And such is your bloom, such is your vigour: And will you presume upon it, presume so far as to continue exposed to all the terrors of divine judgment, in a vain dependence that some years hence you shall consider and escape it?

Oh that you were wise, that you understood

(a) Heb. ix. 27.

(b) Eccles. xi. 3.

(c) Chap. ix. 10.

(d) Job xiv. 10.

this, that you would consider your latter end (a)! oh that you would be willing to converse with the dying, and with the dead! you will no doubt, soon have renewed opportunities of doing it. Some will probably be called away for lessons to the rest; and before the year rolls round, you may perhaps see some pious youth going with joy and triumph to glory, or some careless incorrigible creature dying in terror, or, which is yet more dreadful, in a stupid insensibility of soul. Reflect, my brethren, on what of this kind you have seen; attend to what you may farther see: and remember that the house of mourning may prove a school of the most useful discipline, if the living will lay it to heart (b).

But why do I mention the house of mourning? You are perhaps going to that of feasting \*. The leisure of the season invites to it; and custom hath established it into a law, to close the old year and begin the new with some peculiar vanities, in some more than ordinary forgetfulness of all the important purposes for which time and the opportunities of it are given. Such is our wisdom, such is our gratitude, such is our consistence with the name we bear, and the profession we make!

You are perhaps some of you impressed with what you have heard; but I am much afraid, there are those that within twelve days, or even twelve hours, will have lost the impression, and be as unconcerned about this great judgment, as if God's own hand had sent them a discharge

(a) Deut. xxxii. 29.

(b) Eccles. vii. 3.

\* N. B, This sermon was preached at Northampton, December, 25, 1735.



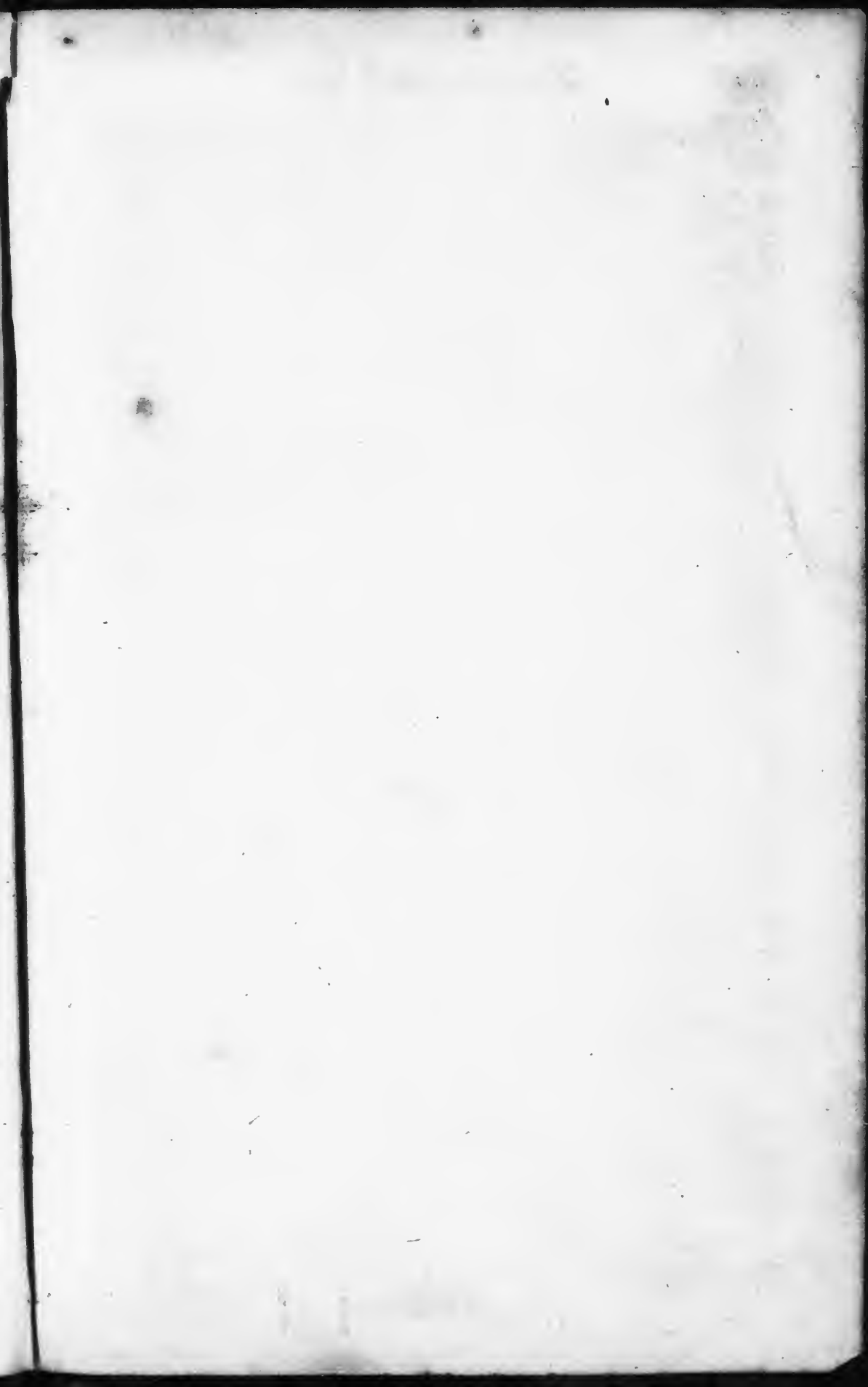
from appearing at it. It is a discouraging case, and it makes us, your ministers almost dread this season, cheerful as it is thought, as that in which former convictions will be worn off, and the heart of unthinking youth will be stealed against those that might otherwise be made; as the season, in which we do, as it were; see the infernal lion bearing away the lambs of our flock even before our faces.

But we will at least cry out for their deliverance, we will lift up our voice like a trumpet (a); and may hope, that some of you will take the warning and hide the word of God in your heart (b). Sinners will no doubt be enticing you, to walk as they do in the way of the heart, and according to the sight of the eyes but consent not (c) to the solicitation, if you would not be destroyed with them, in that day, when they shall appear, as they have now been represented, unable to stand in the judgment (d), and shall perish from this unhappy way which they have taken; and that in a moment, when the wrath of him, whom they now despise, shall but begin to be kindled against them (e); for it shall be kindled with such terrors, that they shall say to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the lamb; for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand (f)? The Lord grant, that you may all find mercy of the Lord in that day (g)! AMEN.

(a) Isa. lviii. 1. (b) Psal. cxix. 11. (c) Prov. i. 10. (d) Psal. i. 5. (e) Psal. ii. 12. (f) Rev. vi. 16, 17. (g) 1 Tim. i. 18.

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